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# The Progressive

100 YEARS 1909-2009

September 2009

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# The Progressive

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This issue of *The Progressive*, Volume 73, Number 9, went to press on August 4.

**Editorial correspondence** should be addressed to *The Progressive*, 409 East Main Street, Madison, WI 53703, or to editorial@progressive.org. Unsolicited manuscripts will be returned only if accompanied by sufficient postage.

**Subscription rates:** U.S.—One year \$32; Two years \$52; Canadian—One year \$42; Two years \$72; Foreign—One year \$47, Two years \$82; Students—\$21 a year. Libraries and institutions—One year (Domestic) \$50; (Canadian) \$60; (Foreign) \$65. Send all subscription orders and correspondence to: *The Progressive*, P.O. Box 421, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-0421. For problems with subscriptions, call toll-free 1-800-827-0555.

*The Progressive* is published monthly. Copyright ©2009 by *The Progressive*, Inc., 409 East Main Street, Madison, WI 53703. Telephone: (608) 257-4626. Publication number (ISSN 0033-0736). Periodicals postage paid at Madison, WI, and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A. *The Progressive* is indexed in the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, Magazine Index, A tentative Press Index, Book Review Index, Environmental Periodicals Bibliography, Media Review Index, Academic Abstracts, Magazine Article Summaries, and Social Science Source. *The Progressive* is available on microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, and on compact discs and other optical, magnetic, or electronic media from the H.W. Wilson Company, 950 University Avenue, Bronx, NY 10452. For permission to photocopy material from *The Progressive*, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center, Customer Service, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923; (978) 750-8400.

**Donations:** *The Progressive* survives on donations from readers. Contributions are tax-exempt when you itemize. Mail checks to *The Progressive*, 409 E. Main St., Madison, WI 53703.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to: *The Progressive*, P.O. Box 421, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0421.

www.progressive.org

## Editor's Note Matthew Rothschild

# The Internet Age

I love the Internet. It's like having the world's libraries at your fingertips. I appreciate the ability to get information quickly—and to comment on it just as quickly. I've always worked at monthly magazines, and until the Internet came along, I had a gag in my mouth twenty-nine days out of every thirty. Now I can respond right away, which I find cathartic. And it's a relief, as an editor who spends a lot of time rejecting other people's manuscripts, to know that writers have plenty of other outlets now. It is no longer true that a free press belongs only to those who own one. Today, if you own a computer, you can get your word out. That has a positive, democratizing effect on the nation's dialogue.

I do recognize the threat the Internet poses to traditional publications, including to magazines like ours. But I'm not throwing in my editor's pen any time soon.

Daily print newspapers face a much tougher dilemma than we do. I'm not sure they're going to make it, as we're seeing their corpses every day on the sidewalk.

The old cliché used to be that you could wrap a dead fish in yesterday's newspaper. Well, you can wrap a dead fish in today's newspaper because the news is already old by the time it gets to your front stoop.

This is, in part, because newspapers routinely scoop themselves on the Internet, and because other news outlets break the stories on the Web before the paper can arrive.

The delivery system is antiquated. And so is the business model. A lot of advertising, especially in this recession, is vanishing. Some is migrating to the Web.

Weekly news magazines are suffering the same fate. The very title of *Newsweek* is from a bygone era. No one, anymore, wants to wait a whole week to figure out what the news of

the last seven days was. We've been soaking in that news, 24/7. Little wonder, then, that *Newsweek* has tried to reinvent itself lately.

But magazines of opinion and investigative reporting, whether they are weekly, monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly, face less of a threat. If we're doing our job right, we detect patterns, without being distracted by ephemera. We expose stories that otherwise would go unreported. We offer thoughtful voices and views that don't reduce themselves to soundbites or chase after the latest scandal.

We can do this in print, and we can do this in electronic form. You can subscribe to the identical electronic version of *The Progressive* if you've already moved beyond paper. And at progressive.org, you can find material that never makes it into the magazine: fresh commentary from the editorial staff, occasional bits of reporting, my McCarthyism Watch compendium, and daily jokes from Will Durst. I invite you to visit us at progressive.org, which will sport a brand new look in a month or so.

But as for me, I like holding a good magazine in my hands. I like turning the pages and noticing how the whole feels greater than the sum of its parts, whereas so often when I'm reading items on the Internet, I feel like all I'm getting is parts. One story whips by as quickly as the next, and we become like Lucy in the chocolate factory, cramming morsels into our mouths before the next one comes down the assembly line, but spilling as we go. This is a crazy way to consume.

Magazines, if they are to survive in print or electronically, will need to serve up more thoughtful offerings. Here at *The Progressive*, we're headed in that direction, with Wendell Berry's profound essay this month. We hope to be giving you more essays like this in the months to come. ♦

## No Comment

### The Guard vs. KBR

Five current and former Oregon Army National Guard soldiers filed suit against KBR, a war contractor, for exposing them to a cancer-causing chemical in Iraq. The suit alleges that managers from Kellogg, Brown & Root, or KBR, knew before the Oregon Guard arrived at the Qarmat Ali water treatment plant in May 2003 that the site was contaminated by hexavalent chromium, a highly toxic carcinogen, reports *The Oregonian*. A spokeswoman for the company said that “KBR did not knowingly harm troops.”

### Investing in Health Care

“Almost thirty key lawmakers helping draft landmark health care legislation have financial holdings in the industry, totaling nearly \$11 million worth of personal investments in a sector that could be dramatically reshaped by this summer’s debate,” reports *The Washington Post*. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has at least \$50,000 invested in a health care index fund. Republican Senator Judd Gregg, a senior member of the health committee, has up to \$560,000 worth of stock holdings in major health care companies, including Bristol-Myers Squibb and Merck. The family of Democratic Congresswoman Jane Harman held at least \$3.2 million in more than twenty health care companies at the end of last year.

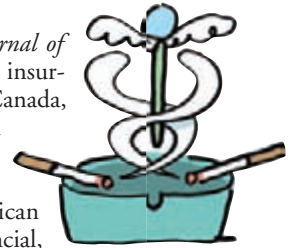
### Republican Sensibilities

From *Democracy Now*: “In Tennessee, Republican State Senator Diane Black is refusing to fire a staffer who sent a racist image of President Obama. The staffer, Sherri Goforth, sent out an e-mail with images of all the Presidents of the United States. Barack Obama was depicted in the bottom right hand corner only as a pair of bright white eyes on a black background. Meanwhile, in South Carolina, a prominent Republican activist has apologized after making a joke on his Facebook page that an escaped gorilla from a local zoo was an ancestor of First Lady Michelle Obama. Rusty DePass is the former Republican state elections director in South Carolina.”

*Readers are invited to submit No Comment items. Please send original clippings or photocopies and give name and date of publication. Submissions cannot be acknowledged or returned.*

### Full Service Operation

A new study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* reveals that life and health insurance companies in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain invest heavily in tobacco companies, reports the Center for Media and Democracy. “The study found that the American insurance company Prudential Financial, Inc., has \$264.3 million invested in U.S. cigarette makers, including Philip Morris and R.J. Reynolds.”



### Iran Charging Bullet Fee

Iranian officials asked the family of a slain nineteen-year-old protester to pay a \$3,000 “bullet fee,” reports *The Wall Street Journal*. “Upon learning of his son’s death, the elder Mr. Alipour was told the family had to pay an equivalent of \$3,000 as a ‘bullet fee’—a fee for the bullet used by security forces—before taking the body back, relatives said.”



### China Leads the Way

“Chinese manufacturers made more than half of the goods that the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recalled last year, but few of them paid any price for producing defective wares,” reports McClatchy. “Roughly 40 percent of imported U.S. consumer goods are from China. Their recall rate is much higher than 40 percent, however. In 2007, the CPSC named Chinese makers in 69 percent of all recalls, of both imported and domestically produced goods. In 2008, China’s share was 53 percent.”

### Agent Orange on the Border

The U.S. Border Patrol has temporarily postponed plans to spray herbicide along the banks of the Rio Grande between the cities of Laredo, Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, reports *newamericamedia.org*. The herbicide would be used to kill fast-growing river cane, which provides cover for people crossing the border. The Border Patrol proposed to begin by defoliating 1.1 miles of the river, with the possibility of expanding the program to 130 miles.



STUART GOLDENBERG

# Letters to the Editor

## Zinn on War

I have always been a huge fan of Howard Zinn's, and I applaud the premise of his July article, "Just Cause Does Not Equal Just War." But he undermines his argument by what he has to say about World War II.

It is at least plausible that the United States might have had it with-in its power to save most of those killed in the Revolutionary and Civil wars by finding alternatives to war. But the fifty million World War II dead that he cites were not primarily the result of our entry into that war. Most of the Russians, Jews, and other Europeans most certainly would have died anyway if we had decided not to fight in Europe. We no doubt added to the carnage, but for Zinn to imply that it might have been within our power to keep most of these people alive is absurd.

If Zinn wants to suggest that U.S. involvement in World War II might not have been "just," then he owes it to his readers to spell out some alternative courses of action and show why the overall result could have been better.

*Alexander W. Astin  
Los Angeles, California*

As much as I'm in accordance with the spirit of Howard Zinn's essay, I must call into question one assertion therein. Zinn states, "Canada is independent of England, isn't it?" Actually, it isn't, as evidenced by recent events in Canada's parliament.

In December 2008, conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper was facing a confidence vote that likely would have removed him from power. The Governor General of Canada (who answers only to the Queen of England) approved Harper's request to "prorogue" parliament, effectively dissolving the legislative body and granting Harper several weeks in which to run an expensive negative PR campaign discrediting the coal-

ition of opposition parties who were seeking the confidence vote.

Such monarchical meddling effectively nullified the will of Canada's citizens.

*Bob Soper  
via e-mail*

I love Howard Zinn's study about how you justify a "just" war. We keep hearing there have always been and always will be wars.

Why is war inevitable? Are humans really that dumb? Can't we evolve one little step further?

*Roberta Crawford Morency  
North Palm Beach, Florida*

I enjoy Howard Zinn, and he made a lot of good points in his article. However, he makes war seem too simple.

I live in a family of veterans. Should my cousin not have shot the man who pushed a child into a car fitted with a bomb and who was about to set the same child on fire? What would have happened if my grandfather hadn't spied on Hitler and hadn't discovered his secret battle plans?

*Margaret Riley  
via e-mail*

I noticed that Howard Zinn failed to mention the attack on Pearl Harbor. What does he suggest we should have done in response? Not to have defended ourselves?

*Alice Goldberg  
Seattle, Washington*

Howard Zinn writes dismissively of World War II: "Fifty million people dead, and yes, you got rid of Hitler." Fifty million dead is a misleading and gross understatement. Yale historian Timothy Snyder demonstrates this in "Holocaust: The Ignored Reality," his article in the July 16 *New York Review of Books*.

A brief excerpt: "The Final Solution, as the Nazis called it, was originally only one of the exterminatory

projects to be implemented after a victorious war against the Soviet Union. Had things gone the way that Hitler, Himmler, and Göring expected, German forces would have implemented a Hunger Plan in the Soviet Union in the winter of 1941-1942. As Ukrainian and south Russian agricultural products were diverted to Germany, some thirty million people in Belarus, northern Russia, and Soviet cities were to be starved to death. The Hunger Plan was only a prelude to Generalplan Ost, the colonization plan for the western Soviet Union, which foresaw the elimination of some fifty million people."

*Morton Mintz  
Washington, D.C.*

I used to subscribe to *The Progressive*. At any rate, for whatever reason, I eventually let my subscription lapse. Recently I received a "personal" letter from Matt Rothschild urging me to get back onboard. I figured what the hell—even if I could not find time to read every word in every issue, the meager amount he was requesting was at least for a damned good cause.

Well, I now have in hand my first issue, and I've indeed read every single word through page 23, upon which ended Howard Zinn's article on "just" wars. As a member and avid viewer of Free Speech TV, I've become hooked on Zinn. Within just three pages he articulated something that should be required reading for every schoolkid in the country.

Long live *The Progressive*, and long live Professor Zinn! (By the way, I will be renewing.)

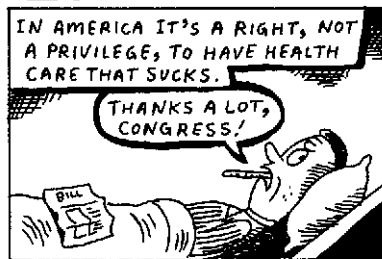
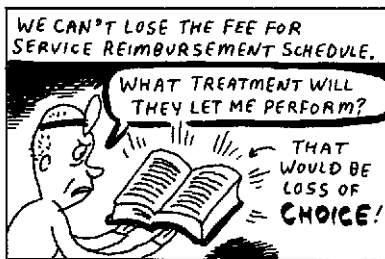
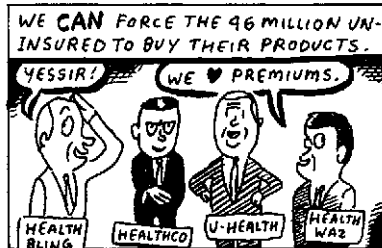
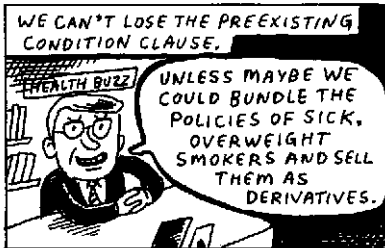
*Bob Friend  
Wauconda, Illinois*

## Truly Inspiring

I was truly inspired by the entire July issue. The editorial on Obama's plan for GM and its repercussions for the nation was prescient ("A Bankrupt

## TROUBLETOWN

BY LLOYD DANGLE



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Move," by Ruth Conniff and Matthew Rothschild). The articles by Representatives Keith Ellison and Dennis Kucinich were also really enlightening ("Don't Ask Permission," and "Our Progressive Vision," respectively).

Reclaiming our government and empowering workaday Americans must be a top priority. A quote from Kucinich sums it up: "Let's work together for that grand progressive vision of America."

Nick Gatsoulis  
via e-mail

I'm a new reader of your magazine, and I must say it fits me like a glove. I get so utterly excited when a new issue comes that reading it is an instant necessity.

What a wonderful feeling it is to sift through my mail and read on your cover that two of my heroes, Keith Ellison and Dennis Kucinich, have contributed. These two men are huge inspirations in my life and a large reason why I'm choosing a poli sci major at the University of Minnesota. They give me hope that not all politicians are corrupt and many work toward equality and peace. The work they're doing for Gaza and the West Bank is amazing. They aren't afraid to tackle such a controversial conflict and work for the brighter future of Palestinians.

Many thanks to *Progressive* contributors for putting together such an amazing magazine.

Jacqueline Koury  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Your April issue, celebrating 100 years of the magazine, is a treasure. As I read it, I felt as though I were following my life. I've been reading *The Progressive* for at least the past sixty-five of my eighty years.

I grew up in Madison, Wisconsin, and my parents subscribed. After our marriage in 1949, my husband and I renewed our subscriptions and gave *The Progressive* small monthly gifts which we could afford as we raised our family.

You did a superb job of editing all those excellent articles. I especially enjoyed reading those by Belle Case La Follette. The front cover art by Sterling Hundley, and the back cover blue sky with IMAGINE PEACE and "love, yoko" brought tears.

Now I've read, and re-read, the July issue. Thank you for sharing with us, your readers, the writings of Eduardo Galeano, Howard Zinn, Amitabh Pal, Matt Rothschild, and parts of the speeches of Representative Ellison, Representative Kucinich, Dolores Huerta, and the interview with Representative Marcy Kaptur. I keep it open to the picture (and speech) of Dolores Huerta, for she is one of my special living heroines. I could mention all of the contributors, for this, too, is a great issue!

It gives me great satisfaction to count *The Progressive* magazine as one of the mind and spirit nurturers of my life! Thank you.

Ellen Newton Duell  
Yellow Springs, Ohio

*The editors welcome correspondence from readers on all topics, but prefer to publish letters that comment directly on material previously published in The Progressive. All letters may be edited for clarity and conciseness, and may appear either in the magazine or on its web page. Letters may be e-mailed to: [editorial@progressive.org](mailto:editorial@progressive.org). Please include your city and state.*

## Losing Health Care

**T**he health care debate has taken a turn for the worse. Republicans are gaining ground in the polls with their ludicrous scare tactics about government-run health care, even though the elderly, the disabled, our veterans, and some of the poorest Americans all receive such health care already and are generally pleased with it. Today, eighty-three million Americans, 28 percent of the entire population, essentially get single-payer health care.

But Republicans, who were against Medicare and Medicaid all along, don't want people to understand that. Instead, they'd prefer that people wear their ideological blinders so tight that one man barked out at a politician, "Keep the government's hands off my Medicare."

Republicans and Blue Dog Democrats would rather protect the billions of dollars of profits that the private insurance companies are raking in than guarantee that every American has comprehensive, affordable health care, which is our birthright.

It seems likely that there won't even be a meaningful public option when all is said and done, even

though that public option was a far cry from single-payer.

By not proposing a single-payer national health care plan, Obama gave up the best arguments and the best blueprints for a reformed system.

Only single-payer would give everyone comprehensive, affordable health care.

Only single-payer would genuinely reduce costs.

Obama's mixed proposal of a public option along with private insurance plans would do neither.

It would be an improvement over the current system, however. It would prohibit insurance companies from denying care to people with preexisting conditions. It would prohibit them from rescinding policies on technicalities. It

would expand Medicaid so more poor Americans could access it. It would require most businesses to offer insurance or to pay a fine. It would expand the federal government's role in health insurance. And, at least in the House bill, it would enable states to experiment with single-payer, thanks to an amendment introduced by Representative Dennis Kucinich.

These are the reasons why some longtime champions of health care in the Capitol, like Senator Teddy Kennedy and Representative Tammy Baldwin, are behind the bill.

**B**ut it's not single-payer. And it's not universal. First of all, it won't go into full effect for a decade, and even then, there would still be an estimated seventeen million people without health care in this country.

What's more, the Obama plan would prevent most people who already have employer-funded health care from taking the public option, so it would be corraling people into the private insurance market.

And the cost savings Obama keeps peddling are largely illusory, as Dr. David Himmelstein and Dr. Steffie Woolhandler of Physicians for a National Health Program have demonstrated. "The public plan option would do nothing to streamline the administrative tasks and costs of hospitals, physicians offices, and nursing homes," they write. "They would still contend with multiple payers, and hence still need the complex cost tracking and billing apparatus that drives administrative costs."

Obama says the insurance companies, the pharmaceutical companies, and the hospitals have all pledged to rein in costs. But we've heard that one before.

And he just assumes that putting all medical files on computers will somehow save lots of money. "The claim that computers will save money is based on pure conjecture," Himmelstein testified to Congress earlier this year. "Indeed, in a study of 3,000 U.S. hospitals that my colleagues and I have recently completed, the most computerized hospitals had, if anything, slightly higher costs."

---

**"A public plan option does not lead toward single-payer, but toward the segregation of patients, with profitable ones in private plans and unprofitable ones in the public plan."**

**—Drs. David Himmelstein and Steffie Woolhandler, founders of Physicians for a National Health Program**



By contrast, single-payer would save lots of money—\$400 billion annually, according to Physicians for a National Health Program. It would eliminate billions of dollars in administrative costs that go into handling various plans from different insurance companies. It would eliminate the expensive advertising, and the bloated profits, and the army of claims deniers.

But Obama didn't have the guts to take all that on. And more's the pity.

Now, with his public option at risk of going down the tubes, tens of millions of people will be forced to buy private health insurance, or they'll be fined for not doing so. No wonder the insurance industry is rubbing its hands together.

Once the insurance industry has all these new customers signed up, it will do its damndest, as it always does, to deny people their claims when they submit them, often on the pettiest grounds.

Wendell Potter, a former health insurance executive at CIGNA, testified about these practices at a Senate hearing on June 24.

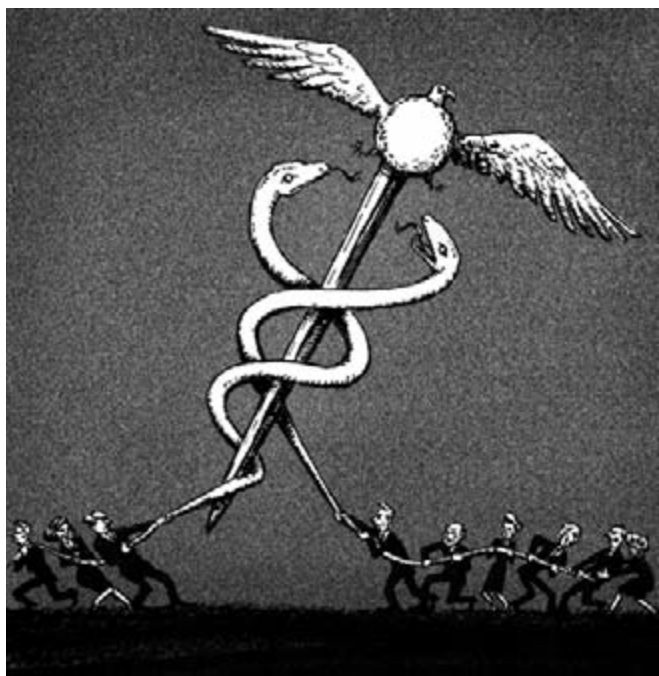
"To help meet Wall Street's relentless profit expectations, insurers routinely dump policyholders who are less profitable or who get sick," he said. "Insurers have several ways to cull the sick from their rolls. One is policy rescission. They look carefully to see if a sick policyholder may have omitted a minor illness, a pre-existing condition, when applying for coverage, and then they use that as a justification to cancel the policy, even if the enrollee has never missed a premium payment."

Potter also talked about an industry practice called "purging," which he said was endemic. Insurance companies "dump small businesses whose employees' medical claims exceed what insurance underwriters expected," he testified. "All it takes is one illness or accident among employees at a small business to prompt an insurance company to hike the next year's premiums so high that the employer has to cut benefits, shop for another carrier, or stop offering coverage altogether."

If the current effort at health reform fails, millions of people will end up paying much more for private health insurance but getting much less than they would under single-payer or under a robust public option.

On top of that, people on Medicare will probably not get more of their drugs covered, and the government will probably not even get the right to bargain with the pharmaceutical companies for bulk discounts.

Make no mistake: Industry is winning, and the American people are losing. The insurance companies and the drug companies are throwing \$1.3 billion a day into lobbying on this issue. They know that's just



JOY KOLTZKY

a tiny investment compared to the whopping profits they stand to make by keeping our health care system largely in private hands. And they are finding many politicians involved in the drafting of the legislation who are on the take.

Early on, Obama made a tactical error by repeatedly insisting that health insurance reform "will not add to our deficit over the next decade." By focusing on confusing and unconvincing economic arguments about how his plan will save money, he surrendered the moral high ground.

How about making sure that wars don't add to our federal deficit over the next decade? Iraq and Afghanistan have already drained \$1 trillion and are on pace to cost a total of \$3 trillion or more before they're over.

And how about making sure that bank bailouts don't add to our federal deficit over the next decade? We've already thrown trillions at Wall Street.

The issue boils down to moral priorities, not fiscal ones.

It boils down to ideology, and the rightwing belief that private is good and public is bad.

And it boils down to whether we have a democracy, or a government in hock to private special interests. ♦

—Matthew Rothschild

**"The great civil rights issue of our time is the need for every man, woman, and child to have health care as a right, not a privilege."**

**—Senator Bernie Sanders**

# HIV Is Not in Recession

AFP PHOTO/UPI/KEVIN DIETSCH



## Washington, D.C.

On July 8, AIDS activists staged a protest in the Capitol rotunda. They criticized the Obama Administration's failure to lift the federal ban on funding needle exchange, and they demanded full funding for global AIDS programs. Police arrested twenty-seven.

*For more information, visit the Health Global Access Project at [healthgap.org](http://healthgap.org).*



AFP PHOTO



AFP PHOTO/UPI/KEVIN DIETSCH

# Crashing the Beach Party



PHOTOS © CODEPINK



## New York City

Bikini-clad activists from the women's peace group Code Pink crashed the Israeli Ministry of Tourism's "Tel Aviv Beach Party" in Central Park to draw attention to war crimes committed by Israel during its ongoing and illegal occupation of Gaza.

*For more information, go to [codepinkalert.org](http://codepinkalert.org).*



**Washington, D.C.**

On July 1, human rights activists marched in front of the State Department to protest the military coup that overthrew the democratically elected government of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya.

*For more information, go to the School of the Americas Watch at [www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org).*

# Standing up for Honduras



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# Public Option Now!

© RICK REINHARD



**Washington, D.C.**

Thousands of health care activists took to the streets of Washington, D.C., on June 25 for a day of action organized by Health Care for America Now. The group organized the event to support the establishment of a government-run health insurance option.

*For more information, go to [healthcareforamericanow.org](http://healthcareforamericanow.org).*



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## On the Line

Washington, D.C.  
ASTRID RIECKEN/THE WASHINGTON TIMES/LANDOV



London  
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## 40 Years Since Stonewall

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New York City



San Diego

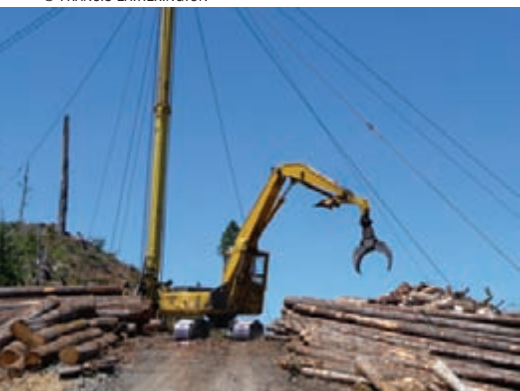
Gay rights activists celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the rebellion at the Stonewall bar in New York City, which ushered in the modern LGBT movement.

*For more information, visit the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force at [thetaskforce.org](http://thetaskforce.org).*

© SARAH BIGGART  
San Diego



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS/SETH WENIG  
New York City



## Saving Oregon's Forests

For more information, go to [earthfirst.org](http://earthfirst.org) or check out the new blog about environmental activism in the Cascades at [forestdefensenow.blogspot.com](http://forestdefensenow.blogspot.com).

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## On the Line

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Environmental activists in Oregon blockaded roads to the Elliott State Forest in early July to stop a timber sale in the forest. The blockade lasted for three days, and police arrested twenty-seven. The activists were criticizing logging practices that they say damage the old-growth forest and endanger the habitat of three

endangered species: spotted owls, marbled murrelets, and coastal coho salmon.

On June 25, about two dozen human rights activists, some hooded and clad in orange jumpsuits, gathered to protest U.S. interrogation policies in front of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. The protesters focused on Judge Jay Bybee, a former attorney in the Office of Legal Counsel in the Bush Administration, who now serves on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Activists also organized a "die in" in front of the Justice Department in Washington, D.C. They are calling on Attorney General Eric Holder to appoint a special prosecutor for torture to investigate crimes perpetrated by Bush Administration officials.

For more information, go to [codepinkalert.org](http://codepinkalert.org).



## Bye Bye, Bybee

AFP PHOTO/KAREN BLEIER

AFP PHOTO/KAREN BLEIER



## Former Felon at the White House



**J.** D. Stier is one of the most upbeat people I've ever met. A star organizer on the Obama campaign, he was recently tapped to work for the White House. You'd never guess that when his peers were going off to college, Stier was headed off to serve a couple of years in prison.

As a teenager growing up in Madison, Wisconsin, Stier started landing in trouble. His mother had been hospitalized for mental illness and his parents divorced. Angry, alienated, and confused, he started getting stoned during the day in high school.

Then, at age eighteen, he was arrested for possession with intent to deliver marijuana.

"I kept getting in deeper and deeper," Stier says. "It's scary how quick it happens. It wasn't that big a step to get into buying a big quantity."

Stier was arrested again, at age nineteen, with seven and a half pounds of marijuana. He was sentenced to three and a half years in prison and shipped off to the Waupun Correctional Institution.

"I'd never been in a fight in my life," he recalls. "I was a 130-pound, twenty-year-old white kid. I grew up pretty colorblind. Now I'm living in an environment where the common

thread is prejudice. There is such visceral, shocking racism."

White inmates called Stier "rug-lover" when he befriended a group of African American men. ("They kind of took me under their wing. They liked that I was this little pot dealer from Madison," he says.) He used humor to defuse tensions. And he

away.

Matthews remembers Stier coming to class perpetually stoned. "But even through that fog I could see there was something interesting about him," he remembers. "Then he suddenly disappeared."

Coincidentally, Matthews's wife was the prison's intake psychiatrist who interviewed Stier. "My wife came home one day and said, 'Do you know some kid named J. D. who took anthropology with you?' It seemed like he was going down the wrong path. The fact that he was arrested didn't surprise me," says Matthews. "The fact that he got sent up to a penitentiary—that surprised me."

Stier gets teary when he talks about his professor finding him. "He saved my life," he says.

Matthews started writing to him in prison.

"He sent me ethnography assignments," Stiers says. "To keep my head above water, he had me do an ethnography

of prison culture. He wrote every week a little postcard saying, 'College is waiting.' It breaks me up just to think about it. He saw something in me I didn't—when you are in prison you know you are garbage. You are a throwaway."

Another person who inspired Stier was Senator Russ Feingold. Shortly after he was incarcerated, Stier read an article about the debate in Washington over withholding financial aid



DAVID HOLLENBACH

began to feel, for the first time in his life, how privileged he was.

He had a full-time job at the prison library, and a father who paid for him to take correspondence courses at the University of Wisconsin.

But most significant, for Stier, was the relationship he maintained with an anthropology professor, Luke Matthews, whom he'd been taking a class with at Madison Area Technical College (MATC) before he was sent

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*Ruth Conniff is the political editor of The Progressive.*

from felons. Feingold was quoted saying that felons are the very people who most need an education.

"I wrote to him—I didn't really know much about who he was," Stier says. "But I was like, 'All right, slick-talking politician guy, that's me.'"

Stier asked Feingold what he could do with his life. To his astonishment, the Senator's office responded.

"I actually get a letter back with the Senate seal on it in my prison cell, telling me about Pell Grants," he says. "I actually got the paperwork started—and it paid for MATC and UW."

"I kept getting in deeper and deeper. It wasn't that big a step to get into buying a big quantity."

When Stier was paroled after two and a half years, he made friends with a Feingold staff person and told her his story. She arranged for him to meet the Senator in person.

Stier was impressed that Feingold took him seriously.

"We talked about policy—the need to shift away from incarceration back to treatment and prevention," he remembers.

Stier went back to school, and reconnected with his old teacher. Matthews introduced him to another student, a former "lost boy" from Sudan. The two became best friends and ended up traveling to Africa together over the summer. When he returned, Stier signed on as a counselor at a teen center, working with kids who were on the same path he'd

been on.

"I took the kids skydiving and rock climbing," he says. "Anything to get out of the stuffy, psychoanalytic environment and start to have some real experiences."

Stier recognized that these teenagers, like the friends he made in prison, had the potential to live happy, productive lives if only they could make some connections with other people and society. "You see what works as youth start to connect

to each other and the community," he says. "As soon as that happens, it's human nature to start doing well."

Still, he saw a lot of pain and waste.

"I went to five funerals as a counselor," he says. "It's just this brutal awareness that we've got to change something. We need some progressive policy changes."

Stier got involved in politics. He became chair of a group called the Alliance for Recovery, and brought

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Dennis D. Williams, Director**

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“They knew my background. They saw through that and knew who I really was,” Stier says. “I was really inspired.”

Stier remembers Election Day vividly.

“It will always be the greatest day of my life,” he says. “One minute after eight they called the state of Wisconsin. We flipped more counties red to blue than any other state in the nation. I cried all night long. People kept saying, ‘J. D., you’ve got to get a grip.’ I felt like my whole life now was worth something.”

Stier helped transform the Obama for America campaign into a new

entity, Organizing for America. And like many in that campaign, he forwarded his résumé to the White House.

In May, President Obama appointed Seattle Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske to direct the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. In his first interview after taking the job, Kerlikowske said something that captured Stier’s imagination. He told *The Wall Street Journal* that the drug war had failed. The new Administration would look at treatment over incarceration as a response to drug abuse. “We’re not at war with people in this country,” Kerlikowske told the *Journal*.

Shortly thereafter, Stier got a call from the White House (he still has the message saved on his cell phone), asking him to come in and talk about opportunities at the drug policy office.

“So I shaved and took out my earring and put on a suit and tie and kept breathing,” Stier recalls. “I said, ‘I’m going to go out there and be myself.’”

Kerlikowske received him warmly, Stier says, coming out from behind his “giant desk” to shake hands and talk about Stier’s unique résumé. The office decided to create a new position called “national outreach coordinator”—and they offered him the job. In September, he will start traveling around the country, talking to teens and counselors in settings like the center where he worked.

“I’ve seen some of what does work and, in my own life, what went wrong,” Stier says.

“If kids see him and the way he talks about life, I can’t imagine they wouldn’t be inspired,” says Matthews, Stier’s old teacher.

“J. D.’s story is nothing short of remarkable,” says Feingold. “He not only worked hard to turn his life around, but once he completed his sentence, he dedicated his life to public service.”

And, hopefully, to ending the failed War on Drugs. ♦

# WASTE OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

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By Wendell Berry  
*Illustration by Alex Nabaum*

# Inverting the Economic Order



**M**Y ECONOMIC POINT OF VIEW is from ground level. It is a point of view sometimes described as “agrarian.” That means that in ordering the economy of a household or community or nation, I would put nature first, the economies of land use second, the manufacturing economy third, and the consumer economy fourth.

The first law of such an economy would be what the agriculturalist Sir Albert Howard called “the law of return.” This law requires that what is taken from nature must be given back; the fertility cycle must be maintained in continuous rotation. An authentic economy, then, would be based upon renewable resources: land, water, ecological health. These resources, if they are to stay renewable in human use, will depend, in turn, upon resources of culture that also must be kept renewable: accurate local memory, truthful accounting, continuous maintenance, unwastefulness, and a democratic distribution of now-rare practical arts and skills. The primary value in this economy would be the capacity of the natural and cultural systems to renew themselves. The economic virtues thus would be honesty, thrift, care, good work, generosity, and (since this is a creaturely and

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*Wendell Berry is a writer and a farmer in Kentucky.*

human, not a mechanical, economy) imagination, from which we have compassion. That primary value and these virtues are essential to what we have been calling “sustainability.”

A properly ordered economy, putting nature first and consumption last, would start with the subsistence or household economy and proceed from that to the economy of markets. It would be the means by which people provide to themselves and to others the things necessary to support life: goods coming from nature and human work. It would distinguish between needs and mere wants, and it would grant a firm precedence to needs.

A proper economy, moreover, would designate certain things as priceless. This would not be, as now, the “pricelessness” of things that are extremely rare or expensive, but would refer to things of absolute value, beyond and above any price that could be set upon them by any market. The things of absolute value would be fertile land, clean water and air, ecological health, and the capacity of nature to renew itself in the economic landscapes. The cultural precedent for this assignment of absolute value that is nearest to us probably is biblical, as in Psalm 24 (“The Earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof . . .”) and Leviticus 25:23 (“The land shall not be sold forever . . .”). But there are precedents in all societies and traditions that have understood the land or the world as sacred—or, speaking practically, as possessing a suprahuman value. The rule of pricelessness clearly imposes certain limits upon the idea of landownership. Owners would enjoy certain customary privileges, necessarily, as the land would be entrusted to their intelligence and responsibility. But they would be expected to use the land as its servants and on behalf of all the living.

The present and now-failing economy is just about exactly opposite to the economy I have just described. Over a long time, and by means of a

set of handy prevarications, our economy has become an anti-economy, a financial system without a sound economic basis and without economic virtues.

It has inverted the economic order that puts nature first. This economy is based upon consumption, which ultimately serves not the ordinary consumers but a tiny class of exces-

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sively wealthy people for whose further enrichment the economy is understood (by them) to exist. For the purpose of their further enrichment, these plutocrats and the great corporations that serve them have controlled the economy by the purchase of political power. The purchased governments do not act in the interest of the governed; they act instead as agents for the corporations.

That this economy is, or was, consumption-based is revealed by the remedies now being proposed for its

failure: stimulate, spend, create jobs. What is to be stimulated is spending. The government injects into the failing economy money to be spent, or to be loaned to be spent. If people have money to spend and are eager to spend it, demand for products will increase, creating jobs, industry will meet the demand with more products, which will be bought, thus increasing the amount of money in circulation, which will increase demand, which will increase spending, which will increase production—and so on until the old fantastical economy of limitless economic growth will have “recovered.”

But spending is not an economic virtue. Miserliness is not an economic virtue either, but saving is. Not-wasting is. To encourage spending with no regard at all to what is being purchased may be pro-finance, but it is anti-economic. Finance, as opposed to economy, is always ready and eager to confuse wants with needs. From a financial point of view, it is good, even patriotic, to buy a new car whether you need one or not. From an economic point of view, however, it is wrong (and unpatriotic) to buy anything you do not need. Only in a financial system, an anti-economy, can it seem to make sense to talk about “what the economy needs.” In an authentic economy, we would ask what the land, what the people, need.

From an economic point of view, a society in which every school child “needs” a computer, and every sixteen-year-old “needs” an automobile, and every eighteen-year-old “needs” to go to college is already delusional and is well on its way to being broke.

In a so-called economy that is dependent on indiscriminate spending, “job creation” often implies an ability to “create” new “needs.” Until lately this economy has been able to create jobs by creating needs. But this has involved much confusion and a kind of fraud. Because it gives no priority to the meeting of needs, and cannot distinguish needs from wants,

our economy has confused necessities with products or commodities that are merely marketable. As a consequence, it deliberately reduces the indispensable economic service of providing needed goods to “selling” or “marketing” products, some of which have never been and will never be needed by anybody. The gullibility of the public thus becomes an economic resource. The category of things sold that are not needed now includes legally marketed foods and drugs. This involves the art (taught and learned in universities) of lying about products; a friend of mine remembers a teacher who said that advertising is “the manufacture of discontent.” And so we have come to live in a world in which every brand of painkiller is better than every other brand, in which we have a “service economy” that does not serve and an “information economy” that does not distinguish good from bad or true from false.

The manufacturing sector of a financial system, which does not or cannot distinguish between needs and induced wants, will come willy-nilly into the service of wants, not needs. And so it has happened with us. If in some state of emergency, our manufacturers were suddenly called upon to supply us with certain necessities—shoes, for example—we would be out of luck. “Outsourcing” the manufacture of frivolities is at least partly frivolous; outsourcing the manufacture of necessities is entirely foolish.

As for the land economies, the academic and political economists seem mainly to ignore them. For years, as I have read articles on the economy, I have waited in vain for the author to “factor in” farming or ranching or forestry. The expert assumption appears to be that the products of the soil are not included in the economy until after they have been taken at the lowest possible cost from those who did the actual work of production, at which time they enter the economy as raw materials for the food, fiber, timber, and lately

the fuel industries. The result is inevitable: The industrial system is disconnected from, is unconcerned about, and takes no responsibility for, its natural and human sources. The further result is that these sources are not maintained but merely used and thus are made as exhaustible as the fossil fuels.

As for nature herself, and her

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accommodation of our needs to eat, drink, breathe, and to be clothed and sheltered, our industrial and financial systems grant her no recognition, honor, or care.

Far from assigning an absolute value to those things we absolutely need, the financial system puts a price, though a highly variable price, on everything. We know from much experience that everything that is priced will sooner or later be sold. And from the accumulating statistics of soil loss, land loss, deforestation,

overuse of water, various sorts of pollution, etc., we have reason to fear that everything that is sold will be ruined. When everything has a price, and the price is made endlessly variable by an economy without a stable relation to necessity or to real goods, then everything is disconnected from history, knowledge, respect, and affection—from anything at all that might preserve it—and so is implicitly eligible to be ruined.

What we have been pleased to call our economy does not acknowledge and apparently does not even recognize its continuing absolute dependence on the natural world, on the land economies, and on the work of farmers, ranchers, and foresters—all of which, given the use of available knowledge and precautions, would be self-renewing. At the same time, with a remarkable lack of foresight or even the sight to see what is presently obvious, this economy has made itself absolutely dependent on resources that are either exhaustible by nature or have been made exhaustible by our wastefulness and our refusal to husband and reuse: fossil fuels, metals, and other mined materials. By standards that are utterly absurd, it has long been “too expensive” to salvage perfectly good and usable materials from old buildings, which we knock down or blow up and haul to landfills, and so make even bricks and stones valueless and irrecoverable. Because of falsely cheap materials and energy, we have a “bubble” of houses too big to be heated efficiently or cheaply, or even to be paid for.

To use our agricultural land for the production of “biofuel,” as some are now doing, is immediately to raise the question whether it can ever be right to replace food production with the production of a fuel to be burned. If this fuel is produced, like most of our food at present, without the close and loving care that the land requires, then the land becomes an exhaustible resource.

Biofuel may be a product of the land and our world-changing technology, but it is just as much a product of ignorance and moral carelessness.

As commodities, the fossil fuels are in a category strictly their own. Unlike other minerals that (in a sensible economy) can be reused, and unlike waterpower that uses water and releases it to be used again, the fossil fuels can be made useful only by being destroyed. They are useful and therefore valuable only in the instant in which they are burning.

To be available for their brief usefulness, these fuels must be dug or pumped from the ground. Their extraction has nearly always damaged, often irreparably, the places and the human communities from which they are taken. For coal to feed the fires by which we live, whole landscapes are destroyed, forests and their soils and creatures are obliterated, streams are covered over, watersheds are degraded and polluted, poisonous residues are left behind, communities are degraded or flooded by toxic wastes or runoff from denuded watersheds, the people are exploited and endangered, their houses damaged, their drinking water poisoned, their complaints and needs ignored. When the fossil fuels, extracted at such a cost to people and nature, are burned, they pollute the atmosphere of all the world, with consequences that are fearful, infamous, and continuing.

In a consciously responsible economy, such abuses would be inconceivable. They could not happen. To damage or destroy an otherwise permanent resource for the sake of a temporary advantage would be readily perceived as senseless by every practical measure and, by the measure of human wholeness, as insane. To value human wants above all the natural and human resources that supply human needs, as the now-failing economy has done, is to run risks and defy paradoxes by which it is bound to fail. If we pursue limitless "growth" now, we impose ever-narrower limits on the future. If we put spending first,

we put solvency last. If we put wants first, we put needs last. If we put consumption first, we put health last. If we put money first, we put food last. If for some spurious reason such as "economic growth" or "economic recovery," we put people and their comfort first, before nature and the land-based economies, then nature sooner or later will put people last.

But the fossil fuels, which involve destruction for the sake of production and again destruction as a consequence of production, are not the only typical products of our anti-economy. Also typical are products that replace, at high cost, goods that once were cheap or free. The genius of marketing and selling has given us, for example, bottled tap water, for which we pay more than we pay for gasoline, because of our perfectly rational fear that our unbottled tap water is polluted. The system of industry, finance, and "marketing" thus makes capital of its own viciousness and of the ignorance and gullibility of a supposedly educated public. By the influence of marketers and sellers, citizens and members are transformed into suckers. And so we have an alleged economy that is not only fire-dependent and consumption-dependent but also sucker-dependent.

For another example, consider the money-drenched entertainment industry. The human species, which has apparently outlived the name *homo sapiens*, is said to be something like 200,000 years old. Except for the last seventy-five or so years of their life so far, and except for their decadent ruling classes, most humans have entertained themselves by remembering and telling stories, singing, dancing, playing games, and even by their work of providing themselves with necessities and things of beauty, which usually were the same things. All of this entertainment came free of charge, as a sort of overflow of human nature, local culture, and daily life. Even the beauty of good work and well-made things

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Raising the flag at Iwo Jima, February 23, 1945

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was a value added at no charge. The entertainment industry has improved upon this great freedom by providing at a high cost, in money but also in health and sanity, an egregiously overpaid corps of entertainers and athletes who tell or perform stories, sing, dance, and play games for us as we passively consume their often degrading productions. The wrong here may be at root only that of an inane and expensive redundancy. If you can read and have more imagination than a doorknob, what need do you have for a “movie version” of a novel?

**T**his strange economy, then, produces in the ordinary course of business products that are destructive or fraudulent or unnecessary or useless, or all four at once. But another of its typical enterprises is remarkable for the production of what I suppose we will have to call no-product, or no product (to the extent that this works) but money. The best-known or longest infamous example of a no-product financial system is the practice of usury, which is to say the lending of money at exorbitant interest or (some have said) at any interest. In our cultural tradition, the condemnation of usury seems to be unanimous.

The Hebrew Bible speaks emphatically against usury in ten of its chapters (by my count), calling it by name, but without much explanation, assuming apparently that its wrongfulness is obvious. But from the context it is clear that usury is understood as an injustice and an offense against charity. It is a way for people of wealth to exploit the poor, whom they have been instructed to care for. Only the wealthy have a surplus of money to lend, and they should not use it to take advantage of the needs of others. Usury, moreover, cannot be consistent with the command (Leviticus 19:18) that “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Jesus in the Gospel of Luke (6:34-35) says: “And if ye lend to them of

whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? For sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again.”

Such free lending may be impossible in our own rootless, massive, and disintegrated society. But I know from my own experience and observation that a bank of community

**In a locally owned community bank, the lender is a neighbor of the borrower. You don't put your neighbors into trouble or into ruin by misleading them to assume debts they cannot pay.**

scale, owned principally by local investors, understanding its dependence on responsible service first of all to local customers—even in a fevered and delirious economy—can function usefully and considerately as a part of the community. Such a bank does not, because if it is to survive it cannot, adopt the lending practices that resulted in our recent housing bubble. In such a bank the loan offi-

cers understand necessarily that their responsibility is to the borrowers as much as to the bank, and that these ultimately are not two responsibilities but one. In a locally owned community bank, the lender is a neighbor of the borrower. You don't put your neighbors into trouble or into ruin by misleading them to assume debts they cannot pay.

**A**mong its other wrongs, usury destabilizes the relation of money to goods. So does inflation. So does the speculative trading in mortgages, “futures,” and “commercial paper,” which gives a monetary value to commodities that have no present existence or no existence at all. To inflate or obscure the value of money in relation to goods is in effect to steal both from those who spend and from those who save. It is to subordinate real value to a value that is false.

By destabilizing the relation of money to goods, a financial system usurps an economy. Then, instead of the exchange of money for goods or goods for money, we have the conversion of goods into money, in the process often destroying the goods. Money, instead of a token signifying the value of goods, becomes a good in itself, which the wealthy can easily manipulate in their own favor. This is sometimes justified (by the favored) as freedom, as in “free trade” or “the free market,” but such a freedom is calculated to reduce substantially the number of the free. The tendency of this freedom necessarily is toward monopoly. The undisguised aim of Monsanto, for example, is to control absolutely the economy of food. It would do so by setting its own price on its products sold to dependent purchasers who can set a price neither on what they buy nor on what they sell.

To permit so much wealth, power, influence, and ambition to one corporation is an egregious error in a polity supposedly democratic. From the point of view of nature and agriculture, it is an error even larger and more

dangerous. By this error agriculture is forced to subserve the rule of industrialism, which is in most respects antithetical to the healthful practice of agriculture and to the laws of nature by which, and only by which, agriculture can be made sustainable.

Agribusiness is immensely more profitable monetarily than agriculture, which almost customarily for the last fifty or sixty years has been either barely profitable or unprofitable. Hence the drastic decline in the agricultural population. One cost of this error is economic injustice, characteristic of industrialism, to the people who do the work: ranchers, farmers, and farm workers. Another cost is first agricultural and then ecological: under the rule of industrialism the land is forced to produce but is not maintained; the fertility cycle is broken; soil nutrients become water pollutants; toxic chemicals and fossil energy replace human work.

We have allowed, and even justified as “progress,” a fundamental disconnection between money and food. And so we are led to the assumption, by ignorant leaders who apparently believe it, that if we have money we will have food, an assumption that is destructive of charity, agriculture, and food. It is a superstition just as wicked as, and hardly different from, the notion that the world is conformable to our wants and we can be whatever we want to be.

Apparently it takes a lot of money, a lot of power, and even a lot of education, to obscure the knowledge that food comes from the land and from the human ability to cause the land to produce. Under the rule of an economy perverted by industrial and financial presumptions, we are destroying both the land and the human means of using the land and caring for it.

We are destroying the land by exposing it to erosion, by infusing it year after year with toxic chemicals (which incidentally poison the water),

by surface mining, and by so-called development. We are destroying the cultures and the communities of land use and land husbandry by deliberately slanting the economy of the food system against the primary producers.

We are losing and degrading our agricultural soils because we no longer have enough competent people available to use them properly and take proper care of them. And we will not produce capable and stewardly farmers, ranchers, and foresters by what we are calling “job creation.” The fate of the land is finally not separable from the fate of the people of the land (and the fate of country people is finally not different from the fate of city people). Industrial technology does not and cannot adequately replace human affection and care. Industrial and financial procedures cannot replace stable rural communities and their cultures of husbandry. One farmer, if that name applies, cannot farm thousands of acres of corn and soybeans in the Midwest without production costs that include erosion and toxicity, which is to say damages that are either long-term or permanent.

The farm population has now declined almost to non-existence because, since the middle of the last century, we have deliberately depressed farm income, while allowing production costs to rise, for the sake of “cheap food” and to favor agribusiness. No wonder that farm-raised young people have been moving into the cities and suburbs by the millions for two generations, leaving the farms without heirs or successors. The young people decide against too much investment and too much work for too little return. But even if they love farming or ranching enough to want to stay, paying the inevitable economic and personal penalties, they are more than likely to find that they cannot buy land and pay for it by using it. The one reason for this is the disequilibrium between the economy of money and the economy of food. Professional people in

the cities, who have done well financially, have been “investing” in farmland and rangeland and so lifting the market value of the land above the reach of farmers and ranchers who are *not* doing well economically. The result is that we have an enormous population of dependent people with the subservient mentality of industrial employees, helpless to feed themselves, who are being fed by the tiniest minority of exploited people and from land that is more cruelly exploited than the people.

If we are destroying both the productive land and the rural communities and cultures, how can we assume that money will somehow attract food to us whenever we need it? If, on the contrary, we should decide to right the economic balance by paying a just price to producers, then money could revert to its proper function of encouraging and supporting both food production and the proper husbanding of the land. This, if it could happen, would solve a number of problems. The right answer to urban sprawl, for example, is to make agriculture pay well enough that farmers and ranchers would want to keep the land in use, and their children would want to inherit it to use.

Since the end of the Great Depression, and even more since the end of World War II, country people have crowded into the cities. They have come because they have attended colleges and been “overeducated” for country life. They have come for available jobs. They have come because television and the movies have taught them to be unhappy in their “provincial” or “backward” or “nowhere” circumstances. They have come because machines have displaced them from their work and their homes. Many who have come were already poor, and were entirely unprepared for a life away from home. Immense numbers of them have ended up in slums. Some live from some variety of “safety net.” Some, the homeless or insane

or addicted poor, sleep in doorways or under bridges. Some beg or steal.

In the long run, these surplus people, the not-needed, have overfilled the "labor pool" and have made labor relatively cheap. If we run short of exploitable poor people in the United States, then we "outsource" our work to the exploitable poor of other countries. Industrial workers and labor unions are having a hard time, and so are farmers, ranchers, and farm workers. If you do the actual work of producing actual products, you must expect to work cheap, for you are not of the quality of the professionals who "deserve" to charge too much for their services or the financial nobility who sell worthless mortgages. As an exploitable underclass, you who perform actual work have raised a vexing question for your superiors, and they seem to have fallen somewhat short of the right answer: How could they get the cheapest work out of you and still pay you enough to afford the products you have made? Though mere workers may be crippled by debt for their house or farm or their children's education, they must still be able with some frequency to buy a new car or pickup truck or television set or motorboat or tractor or combine. If they have such things along with an occasional stunt in Outer Space, then maybe they won't covet a financial noble's private jet and three or four "homes."

Decades of cheap labor, cheap energy, and cheap food (all more expensive than has been imagined) have allowed our society to incorporate itself in a material structure that will have to be seen as top-heavy. We have flooded the country, the roadsides and landfills with shoddy "consumer goods." We have too many houses that are too big, too many public buildings that are gigantic, too much useless space enclosed in walls that are too high and under roofs that are too wide. We replaced an until-then-adequate system of railroads with an interstate highway system, expensive to build, disruptive of

neighborhoods and local travel, increasingly expensive to maintain and use. We replaced an until-then-adequate system of local schools with consolidated schools, letting the old buildings tumble down, replacing them with bigger ones, breaking the old ties between neighborhoods and schools, and making education entirely dependent on the fossil fuels.

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Every rural school now runs a fleet of buses for the under-aged, and provides a large parking lot for those over sixteen who "need" a car to go to school. Education has been oversold, overbuilt, overelectrified, and made more expensive. Colleges have grown into universities. Universities have become "research institutions" full of

undertaught students and highly accredited "professionals" who are overpaid by the public to job-train the young and to invent cures and solutions for corporations to "market" for too much money to the public. And we have balanced this immense superstructure, immensely expensive to use and to maintain, upon the frail stem of the land economy which we conventionally abuse and ignore.

**T**here is no good reason, economic or otherwise, to wish for the "recovery" and continuation of the economy we have had. There is no reason, really, to expect it to recover and continue, for it has depended too much on fantasy. An economy cannot "grow" forever on limited resources. Energy and food cannot stay cheap forever. We cannot continue forever as a tax-dependent people who do not wish to pay taxes. Delusion and the future cannot serve forever as collateral. An untrustworthy economy dependent on trust cannot beguile the people's trust forever.

The old props have been kicked away. The days when we could be safely crazy are over. Our airborne economy has turned into a deadfall, and we have got to jack it down. The problem is that all of us are under it, and so we have got to jack it down with the least possible suffering to our land and people.

I don't know how this is to be done, and I am inclined to doubt that anybody does. You can't very skillfully jack something down if you didn't know what you were doing when you jacked it up.

But we have got to begin by treating our land with the practical and effective love that alone deserves the name of patriotism. From now on, if we would like to continue here, our use of our land will have to be ruled by the principles of stewardship and thrift, using as the indispensable measure not monetary profit or industrial efficiency or professional success but ecological health. ♦

By Les Leopold  
Illustration by Mark Jarman

# Wall Street's Gall



*"Morgan Stanley plans to repackage a downgraded collateralized debt obligation backed by leveraged loans into new securities with AAA ratings in the first transaction of its kind, said two people familiar with the sale. Morgan Stanley is selling \$87.1 million of securities that it expects to receive top AAA ratings and \$42.9 million of notes graded Baa2, the second-lowest investment grade by Moody's Investors Service."*

*—Bloomberg News, July 8, 2009*

**Y**OU'VE GOT TO ADMIRE their gall. Wall Street firms crashed the entire world economy by selling fantasy finance instruments. They got bailed out by us to the tune of trillions of dollars in TARP money, cheap loans, and asset guarantees. And then they take our money and start it all over again!

And nobody in a position to do so seems willing to stop them.

Actually, the story is so outrageous that Wall Street is counting on us not to believe it.

Let's take it from the top. Starting in the late 1970s, the nation embarked on a grand experiment.

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*Les Leopold, the executive director of the Labor Institute and the Public Health Institute in New York, is author of "The Looting of America: How Wall Street's Game of Fantasy Finance Destroyed Our Jobs, Pensions and Prosperity and What We Can Do About It."*

Our leading economists and policy makers believed heart and soul that our economy truly could become magnificent if we did two things: 1) deregulate financial services as much as possible; and 2) “reform” the tax code so that the wealthiest among us would be unshackled to create new and wondrous investments and products for our economy. These steps (along with demolishing unions, gutting the minimum wage, and running pell-mell toward globalization) were to bring about an investment boom of mammoth proportions throughout our economy, and so raise all boats.

The yachts sure did rise. Here are some statistics:

- In 1970, the ratio of the top 100 corporate CEOs and the average worker’s pay was 40 to 1. By 2007 it was 1,723 to 1.
- In 1970, the top 1 percent received 8 percent of the national income. By 2007, it was gobbling up 23 percent of the national income.
- In 2006, the top one-tenth of 1 percent of tax payers (about 140,000 tax returns) reported as much income as the bottom 50 percent (67.4 million tax returns). The last time we suffered from such an extreme income distribution? 1928-29.

Most of us had leaky boats. Between 1975 and 2007, the real wages of the average production worker (94 million of them, as of 2007) decreased by 18 percent.

So what did the tiny fraction do with all the money? Some of it was invested in the real economy. But there was so much money looking for tangible investments that opportunities dwindled along with rates of return. As a result, *The Wall Street Journal* noted four years ago, “Global investors are diving into a wide range of riskier assets: emerging countries’ stocks and bonds; real estate and real-estate-backed debt; commodity funds; fine art; private-equity funds, which buy stakes in nonpublic companies; and the investment contracts called derivatives, including a kind

structured to permit the sophisticated to take huge bond risks.”

Wall Street did what finance always does when income distributions get out of whack. It created a fantasy finance casino to attract that surplus capital.

Wall Street’s hottest products were built around collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) and other derivatives, which Warren Buffett has called “financial weapons of mass destruction.” Investment alchemists turned subprime loans, junk bonds, and risky auto loans into AAA-rated securities. They sliced and diced vast

## How Wall Street grew fat and rich—richer than ever in the history of finance.

pools of this debt into securities that had varying amounts of risks that corresponded with various rates of return. The more risk, the higher the rate of return. And all of the rates turned out to be higher than comparably rated plain vanilla corporate or government bonds. It was a miracle of financial innovation.

Elite investors, hungry for the higher returns, grabbed these new securities as fast as they could. And since each one contained enormous embedded fees for the top banks and investment houses that produced them, Wall Street grew fat and rich—richer than ever in the history of finance.

The demand for these new products grew so great that the supply of junk debt couldn’t keep up with it. There just weren’t enough subprime mortgages to feed the beast. So our financial engineers invented new

securities. Rather than taking the time and expense to assemble new pools of junk debt, they used insurance policies, called credit default swaps, to make “synthetic” collateralized debt obligations. Again the rating agencies, which were (and still are) paid by the large financial institutions to rate their goodies, would bless most of the slices with AA and AAA ratings.

These new synthetic CDOs also sold briskly, which led to even more exotic inventions like CDOs squared and cubed. All of it was unregulated.

Some institutions, like AIG, decided they could make a killing if they insured the risky CDO investments of others from default. The more fantasy finance instruments they insured, the more premiums they received, and the more secure their counterparties felt having their CDO slices guaranteed against failure. What a felicitous confluence of interests. The consumer got access to more and more credit, the wealthy got higher rates of returns, and Wall Street got fat fees—and then bonuses that would have made the Pharaohs blush.

There was only one small problem. The underlying assets that propped up this entire house of cards were getting shakier and shakier. When housing prices shot through the roof, losing all contact with economic reality, our deeply indebted consumers could not possibly continue to increase their debt load. The inevitable happened. Prices stopped rising and then declined. Strapped homeowners fell behind on their payments. The asset values behind the loans declined. The value of CDOs formed from the pools of junk debt declined, as did the various offspring of the synthetic securities. Through the miracle of modern financial engineering (and old-time greed), trillions of dollars of securities turned toxic in a manner of months, crashing the world’s financial system. Credit froze because every major financial institution was loaded with toxic assets and knew that others



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were in the same fix. They refused to loan to anyone. The freeze pushed the real economy off a cliff since nearly every business runs on credit. No credit, no jobs, no mortgage payments—and down we go. Welcome to the Great Depression II.

To reboot the system, Wall Street received trillions of dollars of loans, asset guarantees, and TARP funds almost overnight—the greatest transfer of wealth since slavery. Nomi

**Morgan Stanley is once again peddling financial weapons of mass destruction—this time with a public subsidy.**

Prins, the writer and former managing director at Goldman Sachs, calculates that Wall Street has sponged up over \$13.3 trillion and counting.

Having put the entire financial sector on the dole, Congress suffered a momentary bout of populism and instituted wage caps on bankers at those institutions that received TARP funds. Needless to say, TARP recipients wanted to pay back the Treasury as rapidly as possible so that the elite bankers and traders could go back to high-flying compensation packages.

Morgan Stanley is among the first to break clear of TARP restrictions. On June 17, with much ballyhoo in the press, they paid back \$10 billion to the Treasury. I'm sure many fine wines were cracked open that night. Whoopee! We're free of the \$500,000 wage cap (which to Wall Street top executives is barely a subsistence wage). And since new financial regu-

lations have not as yet been enacted, this is the perfect time to boost profits through a little casino CDO gambling.

Here's the hidden outrage to which Prins draws our attention: Even after the TARP repayments, Morgan Stanley still owes us nearly \$25 billion. They are profiting mightily from the \$23.7 billion "Temporary Liquidity Guarantee Program," which gives investors a big incentive to throw their money at the banks again because the government has them covered.

So Morgan Stanley is once again peddling financial weapons of mass destruction. It is repackaging old toxic assets into new ones—and booking fat fees in the process. Apparently, they've also added a new layer of guarantees so that our trusty watchdog of financial probity—Moody's—will bless it with a AAA-rating. But don't hold your breath thinking that you'll share in the spoils of this rich man's game. The public is subsidizing Morgan Stanley's experiment in gall, but the profits will stay squarely in Morgan Stanley's private pockets.

And just to rub it in so it really hurts: They're using their listener-supported funds to finance the lobbyists who are fighting any and all controls on their crap game, including the proposed Consumer Financial Protection Agency.

The Obama Administration and Congress have a golden opportunity to shut down this casino before the dice roll. They should prohibit the creation of new collateralized debt obligations. They should outlaw the future securitization of mortgages. And they should insist that any financial instrument that serves as an insurance policy be strictly regulated, just like insurance is supposed to be.

Wall Street is carefully watching this test. Will Obama, Biden, Summers, Geithner, Bernanke, Dodd, or Frank do something, or just blink? Right now we've got a lot of fluttering eyelashes. ♦

By **Kathy Kelly and Dan Pearson**

*Illustration by Barry Bruner*

# Making Refugees in Pakistan

**S**URROUNDED BY FARMLAND in Pakistan's Swabi district, the village of Shah Mansoor can be reached by a bumpy road. Outside the village, thousands of tents have become a temporary home to displaced Pakistanis from the Swat area. Traumatized by their recent past and uncertain about their future, they languish in the stifling heat, feeling trapped and abandoned. On June 10, we visited the camp and met people who had fled their homes because of fierce fighting in the Swat Valley.

As camp residents clustered around us, a shopkeeper began to tell about the horror they had endured before arriving in Shah Mansoor. Subjected to a twenty-four-hour curfew, they couldn't leave their homes during the first weeks of the Pakistani offensive. The shopkeeper said that Pakistan's armed forces indiscriminately shelled their town, Mingora, in an effort to dislodge suspected supporters of the Taliban. On May 27, the curfew was lifted for several hours. Families scrambled to grab belongings and

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*Kathy Kelly and Dan Pearson are co-coordinators of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, based in Chicago. In late May and early June, they traveled to Pakistan.*



escape on foot.

Amid the commotion and chaos, harried residents also tried to bury some of the corpses they saw along the road leading out of town.

"There were not hundreds but thousands of dead bodies on the streets," said the shopkeeper. "We had only enough time to dig a mass grave and cover some of the bodies with mud."

Exhausted after a three-day walk, the refugees finally reached Shah Mansoor. "They were killing us in that way, there," the shopkeeper said, "and now in this way, here." He motioned toward the tents.

There are increasingly frequent cases of diarrhea, scabies, and malaria, which are especially lethal for young children.

A few days earlier, we visited a hospital in nearby Ghazi, where ten families from the Swat Valley had sought temporary shelter. The hospital was dilapidated and largely abandoned. The only functioning section was a small clinic and dispensary that opened for a few hours in the morning. We didn't see any doctors or nurses, and the newly displaced people inhabiting the hospital said very few medical supplies were available.

People living in the decrepit Ghazi hospital introduced us to a man who had shrapnel wounds on his back. He told us that on May 21, he and seven others were attempting to flee the violence in Buner when the Pakistan army attacked their van, killing one of the passengers and wounding five. The attack was launched from an American-made Cobra helicopter.

Three such helicopters flew overhead as we ended our conversation with residents in the tent encampment at Shah Mansoor.

"These are the same as those that shelled us," the shopkeeper said. "We've seen these helicopters fire at this mountain. The explosives splinter the mountainside. The children are afraid that the helicopters will hit them again."

We heard similar stories about children frightened of military attacks when we visited with a villager from North Waziristan who had survived U.S. drone attacks in his region.

"When there is a drone up above, the children don't play in a group because they don't want the drone to hit them," said our visitor. "They scatter and run away, and they stop playing for some hours."

He explained that drone surveillance and occasional strikes have become an inescapable fact of life in Khaisor, a village of about 500 people.

The drones, he said, are more likely to fire on groups than on individuals standing alone, and some of those groups are perfectly innocent. A time-honored custom of serving a meal to visitors can occasion a drone attack, he added.

In the village of Khaisor, on May 16, a U.S. drone fired a missile into the village at 4:30 a.m., killing a dozen people, and wounding a dozen more, he said.

The previous day, some travelers had come to Khaisor, and the villagers had served them a meal. "This is our custom," our friend told us. "It is our traditional way." But these travelers were members of the Taliban, and their visit was noted by U.S. forces. It is possible they were identified through pictures taken by unmanned U.S. drones. Although the visitors had left right after their meal, the United States responded by bombing the homes of the hosts early the following morning.

Other villagers then rushed to the area where the missile had hit, hoisting injured survivors onto their shoulders and carrying them across rugged terrain to the nearest road (about five kilometers away from the village) where, lacking vehicles of their own and with no hope of getting an ambulance, they waited for a car to stop to take them to a nearby center run by the Red Cross.

For three days following the attack, people collected in the village,

coming in from all over the region for the funeral prayers.

"Everyone says we should get rid of the Americans," our friend told us.

Now, even funeral prayers have been attacked.

On June 23, mourners gathered in the North Waziristan village of Lattaka for funeral prayers after a drone killed Khwaz Wali Mehsud, a close associate of Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud. The early morning attack had also killed five other suspected low-level militants. Later in the day, when the villagers and supporters of Khwaz Wali gathered for funeral prayers, two drones fired two missiles on the gathering. Pakistani journalist Nur Behram reported that among the thirty-five villagers who died in the attack on the funeral, ten were children aged five to ten years, and four were local tribal elders.

"Of the sixty cross-border predator strikes carried out by the Afghanistan-based American drones in Pakistan between January 14, 2006, and April 8, 2009, only ten were able to hit their actual targets, killing fourteen wanted Al Qaeda leaders, besides perishing 687 innocent Pakistani civilians," reports the Pakistani newspaper *The News*.

Meanwhile, the overall rate of violent attacks inside of Afghanistan has never been higher. In the first week of June, there were more than 400 insurgent attacks. In comparison, attacks in January 2004 were less than fifty per week.

We asked our friend from North Waziristan about alternatives to the fighting.

"The Americans should come and sit with us and throw away their arms," he said.

This is not his hope alone. At the entrance to the Shah Mansoor camp, a billboard displays an image of a rifle with a line drawn through it. Weapons are prohibited here. But outside the camp, and in the skies, there is no such sanctuary. ♦

*by Amy Goodman*

# Rafael Correa

Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa is an economist by training. He is a fierce critic of international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The former finance minister of Ecuador was elected president in 2006, then reelected to a second term earlier this year.

In June, President Correa was in New York attending the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development. Correa was one of the few world leaders to attend the conference.

I interviewed President Correa in the Ecuadorian mission in New York during his visit. It was before the coup in Honduras.

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*Amy Goodman is the host and executive producer of Democracy Now. This is adapted from the interview she did with Correa on her show.*



In a wide-ranging interview, I spoke with him about global capitalism, his decision not to renew the license for the U.S. military base in Manta, the lawsuit against Chevron brought by Amazon residents for toxic oil pollution, Ecuador's relationship with Colombia, and his advice to President Obama. Part of that advice was: "To learn more and come to better understand the region, and to not let himself be taken along by the power of certain media outlets that are compromised with certain ideological beliefs, and to realize that the heroes aren't necessarily heroes, and the villains aren't necessarily villains."

**Q • So many heads of state did not attend the U.N. Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development. According to press reports, Western diplomats said the conference was just a platform to attack capitalism. What's your response?**

**Rafael Correa:** Well, if this is an attack on capitalism, I think it's well deserved. Look at the problem it's got us into. I don't understand those who say they're not here because it might descend into an attack on capitalism. They must have a strong ideological bias, because if they thought maybe there would be an attack on socialism, they would have been delighted to have come.

**Q: Talk about why you think at this point capitalism should be criticized.**

**Correa:** What we've undergone in recent decades worldwide has been totally insane, and all of this is a result of capitalism. The workforce in Latin America was treated as a vulgar instrument for capital accumulation. Mechanisms of exploitation were imposed, such as outsourcing, labor mediation, and the like. Efforts were made to destroy nation-states, or at least to minimize nation-states, especially in key areas such as the economy, on grounds that were closer to religion than to science—that everything would be resolved by the marketplace.

The results are plain to see: greater inequality in Latin America; unemployment is higher than in previous decades; we haven't resolved the problem of poverty; we've lost a great deal of sovereignty.

And finally, we're facing a crisis that we have not provoked, yet we are the main victims of the greatest crisis since the 1930s. It's not been generated by factors external to the system, but by factors that are of the very essence of the system: exacerbated individualism, deregulation, competition, and so on. This clearly shows us that something has to change.

**Q: Why is Ecuador joining the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA)?**

**Correa:** Why not? We are friendly countries, sister countries. We coincide on many points of view. So why not take that step towards integration? Those of us who have acceded to ALBA want to see the integration of Latin American peoples.

**Q: You recently threw out a U.S. diplomat, Armando Astorga, calling him "insolent and foolish" and saying he treated Ecuador "like a colony."**

**Correa:** The U.S. Embassy kept funding certain police and intelligence units. Well, this itself is sufficiently serious. But it wasn't even unconditional assistance. Rather, they would choose the directors of those police units. They had them take lie-detector tests at the U.S. Embassy. So those units answered more to the U.S. Embassy than to the Ecuadorian state.

And we, in the exercise of our sovereignty, wanted to change the director of one of those units. Mr. Astorga, in a totally arrogant manner, sent a letter saying that we need to give back everything that the United States has given us—computers, automobiles, and so on. Well, they should take it all back then. But Mr. Astorga would also have to leave the country because we are no one's colony.

**Q: Do you think President Obama represents something different to Latin America and Ecuador?**

**Correa:** Yes, I'm convinced that is the case. Indeed, we've already begun very fruitful bilateral dialogues at a very high level, which never happened with the Bush Administration. And not just that, there's a question of building trust, and I think that President Obama offers trust. Personally, I think he is a transparent individual with the right intentions. So I think things are going to change in terms of U.S. foreign policy, especially with respect to Latin America.

**Q: Tens of thousands of indigenous people in your country have brought suit against Chevron. An expert appointed by the Ecuadorian judge has said that Chevron should pay \$27 billion. Where do you stand on this?**

**Correa:** This is private litigation brought by social organizations in the Amazon region against this transnational corporation. And there, the Ecuadorian government has nothing to do, judicially speaking.

Obviously, we have borne witness to the harm caused in the Amazon, and we're in solidarity with those social organizations.

But I reiterate, as the executive branch, we cannot meddle in judicial matters.

**Q: You have gone to the area, though, and shown support. What is the harm done?**

**Correa:** It's terrible. If you go into the Ecuadorian Amazon and you stick your hand in the ground, what you get is oil sludge. The oil companies continue doing whatever they please. But at that time, it was really the law of the jungle. There was no processing of waste, of contaminated water. Everything was dumped in the rivers.

They dumped the oil wherever with total impunity because there was no oversight by the state. These companies really did abuse the country. These companies have done in our country something they never would have dared to do in the United States. And it is time that they answer to the justice system.

**Q: *The Wall Street Journal* reports the Colombian government uncovered documents on a laptop when Colombia raided Ecuador and killed a FARC leader, linking you to the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). What is your response?**

**Correa:** If they show that I have some connection to the FARC, then I'll step down. It's a big lie, and we have presented a denunciation through the foreign ministry. And if they don't rectify that, we will take the appropriate legal actions. We are tired of such infamies, which are not based on facts. They're based on interests that seek to treat certain governments, which are their allies, as superheroes and other governments as villains.

A daily newspaper should report the news, not play at geopolitics. In any event, the column is based on information that long ago was shown to be unreliable: supposed computers with supposed messages in which supposedly there is talk of a former member of the national government, not the president of the republic, negotiating with the FARC. Indeed, those computers also supposedly talk about the Workers' Party of [Brazilian President] Lula da Silva having ties with FARC. It's really just a geopolitical game that they're pursuing.

**Q: How do you think peace can be achieved in Colombia?**

**Correa:** Einstein said if somebody time and again



“Obama . . . should bear in mind that just as he is a good person, there are many of us presidents in Latin America who are also good people.”

does something, or tries to do something, with the same negative results, and continues to insist on doing so, then he's a fool. This strategy carried out, applied by the United States in Colombia, has been a total failure. Drugs have not been eradicated. It could be that the FARC have been weakened. But quite sincerely, I don't think there's any military solution to the conflict with the FARC, but rather a political solution. And what they have accomplished in pursuing a military solution is extending the conflict to neighboring countries and destabilizing the region.

**Q: What's your overall advice to the new President of the United States, President Obama, in how he approaches Latin America?**

**Correa:** Well, I'm not accustomed to giving advice to those who haven't asked for it. I would just want to wish President Obama the best of luck, and that he should bear in mind that just as he is a good person, there are many of us presidents in Latin America who are also good people.

**Q: The U.S. contract with Ecuador over one of the largest U.S. military bases in Latin America, Manta, expires later this year. You will not renew it. Why?**

**Correa:** Why renew it? Now, if you'd like, I would renew it with one condition: that they allow me to set up an Ecuadorian military base here in New York. ♦

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## Poem

### **My Mother Refused to Weed**

My mother refused to weed  
she had lived through  
depression and war  
she had been glad to leave the city  
she wanted nothing to die  
she wanted everything to flourish and thrive  
when she planted she crumbled the clods by hand  
her garden was a thriving mess  
some years a hall of sunflowers  
a chaos of vivid cosmos some years  
“dependable beauty” said the catalog  
we have photographs of her  
in a peasant blouse in that garden laughing  
wearing her mortality on her face that was never veiled  
the flowers shoulder high she was so small  
ultimately raspberries took over  
thorny canes arched across her cement walk  
a sign of pride and a problem for the mailman but he forgave her  
I wanted her to cut them but she would not  
The berries were so delicious  
she wanted to feed me  
and feed me

—Alicia Ostriker

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*Alicia Ostriker's eleven books of poetry include "The Volcano Sequence" and "No Heaven." Her 1980 anti-war poem sequence, "The Mother/Child Papers," has recently been reprinted by the University of Pittsburgh Press. Ostriker teaches in the Low-Residency Poetry MFA Program of Drew University.*



# Nationalism Rules at Macalester



Some people go to college and become a Wildcat, a Blue Devil, or a Seminole. I was a Fightin' Scot. No semi-pro sports factory for me. I attended Macalester College, a small liberal arts school in St. Paul, Minnesota, with 1,850 students, back in the mid-1990s. It fit me like a well-oiled baseball glove: no frats, lots of fiery debates, and a sports program that was at times regarded as a rumor. The military regimentation that marks big-time college sports programs just wasn't an easy match for a school that offered a course called Physics for Poets. Students were always more likely to cheer on a building takeover than a touchdown.

We were an institution of iconoclasts and outsiders. Sports had to fit into that general mosaic. It was high school turned on its head.

That's what makes a recent lawsuit leveled against my alma mater all the more troubling, as the school appears to have tumbled into our post-9/11 fever dream.

A 2009 grad named Jacob Bond contends in court that he was booted from the football team his sophomore year because he refused to remove his helmet during the national anthem. For anyone who thinks

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*Dave Zirin is the author of several books on the politics of sports, including "A People's History of Sports in the United States."*

the marriage of sports and nationalism is in need of a divorce, this could be reason enough to support young Mr. Bond.

But even if you sleep with a flag pin fastened to your pajamas, you might find yourself sympathizing with Bond because the anthem was actually being played on an adjacent field for a high school soccer game.

For assistant coach Patrick Bab-

responded. Within twenty-four hours, the lineman was out on his ear.

The school denies it did anything wrong, though it acknowledges there was an "incident" on the field that day.

"I think the norm [of responding to the anthem] would be respect, but there would never be any kind of penalty because of free speech," said Laurie Hamre, vice president for stu-

dent affairs, according to *Inside Higher Ed*. The office of civil rights in the U.S. Department of Education also looked into the matter and sided with the school, the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* reported.

But Bond alleges that he was discriminated against not only because of his political beliefs but also because he has Asperger's syndrome, a mild form of autism. This never stopped him from playing all four years in high school and his freshman season at Mac, but all of a sudden his "disability" allegedly became an

issue.

Macalester professor Peter Rachleff, a labor historian and community activist, looked into the situation (per my suggestion) and met with the school president, Brian Rosenberg. According to a letter from Rachleff to the office of civil rights in the U.S. Department of Education, Rosenberg said there were confidential issues regarding Jacob's "condition." As Rachleff wrote, "President Rosenberg asked me to keep confidential Jacob's condition, to drop my investi-



PATRICK MARTINEZ

cock, that was reason enough for Jacob and his teammates to stop practice, remove helmets, and stand at attention. Seems extreme for West Point, let alone Macalester.

Bond, who held strong disagreements with Bush's war in Iraq, just said no. "I don't think that with the actions of our government that our national anthem is important enough to interrupt a football practice," he told *Inside Higher Ed*.

"Why do you always have to be different?" Bond contends Babcock

gation into the entire situation, and to discourage further publicity. He advised me that such a course of action would be 'in the student's interest.'"

Soon, the story was out that Bond was dismissed for confidential health reasons. Jacob's mother, Trudy Bond, was appalled.

"What was most shocking to me, after the manner in which Jacob was removed from the team, were the lies and coverup by the coach and the administration at Macalester, to the point they used his disability as an excuse for their actions," she said to me. "All that was initially requested was an apology."

Rachleff sees the college's actions in the Bond case as symptomatic.

"This incident on the football practice field and its handling by the college administration was one more milepost in Macalester College's institutional trek in this twenty-first

century from mildly left-of-center to solidly right-of-center," he tells me. "This journey has involved shifts in policies, practices, resources, and image, from the jettisoning of 'need blind' admissions to the construction of the Twin Cities' largest private athletic facility . . . even as we pay lip service to 'civic engagement.'"

Rachleff pointed to the school's reaction last summer, when student activists from around the world, invited by Macalester's own, sought permission to camp out on campus grounds while participating in protests and demonstrations at the Republican National Convention. The school informed the students that "the appearance of sleeping bags or tents would lead to calls to local police to arrest 'trespassers,'" Rachleff recalls.

"The college's political odyssey seems to revolve around the reconstruction of conventional masculini-

ty, with competitive football one of its epicenters," he says. "Intercollegiate competitive sports rules, while the arts languish in a falling down, overcrowded building. The agenda here has become the displacement of critical thinking and questioning conventionality and authority with patriotism, nationalism, and normative masculinity. Free speech is but collateral damage."

From an institution for intelligent outcasts to a quiet preserve of privilege. From a place where sports had a sense of proportion to a place where the arts are now on the back of the bus. My dear alma mater has journeyed from Mac to McSchool. It's certainly not the only college to sand off its edges in the post-9/11 world, but I would have expected more from the Macalester that I knew. That remarkable place no longer seems to exist. ♦

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By Elizabeth DiNovella

Photos by Robin Davies

# Calexico

## Crosses Frontiers

I've always wanted to see the Tucson-based band Calexico perform. I first fell in love with its sound in 2001 when it released *Even My Sure Things Fall Through*. The album begins with an eerie, atmospheric instrumental called "Sonic Wind." The strumming guitars and mariachi accents transported me to a desolate landscape. If the desert had a soundtrack, this was it.

Calexico followed up with 2003's *Feast of Wire*, which featured tinny trumpets and brass horns reminiscent of Miles Davis's *Sketches of Spain*. Electronic dub beats and waltzing rhythms rounded out the album.

So when I found out Calexico had a gig at the cabaret Metro in Chicago last November, I made the

trek. I had high expectations, and was not disappointed.

Critics often pigeonhole Calexico as a western band. But its eclectic music defies categories. Calexico blends Mexican folk, surf rock, jazz, country, and Eastern European gypsy music into something original.

"I went to Prague years ago and I brought my cas-

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*Elizabeth DiNovella is the culture editor of The Progressive.*

sette recorder to do field recordings of subway music, sounds, and trains, and the language coming in on the loud speaker system when the doors close,” says singer and multi-instrumentalist Joey Burns. Dressed in a black button-down shirt and a Carhartt jacket, his jeans rolled at the ankles, Burns looks like the typical indie rocker. “For me, it’s always been this hodgepodge of different influences.”

Burns and drummer John Convertino formed the band more than fifteen years ago. They remain its mainstays, though the band continues to evolve. The current roster includes Jacob Valenzuela, Martin Wenk, pedal steel player Paul Niehaus, and bassist Volker Zander.

Calexico released its sixth album, *Carried to Dust*, last year. “Victor Jara’s Hands,” the opening track, tells the story of the Chilean singer and political activist who was arrested, tortured, and ultimately murdered following the 1973 U.S.-endorsed Chilean coup.

The group heard Jara’s story when it toured Argentina and Chile. “We walked away with this sense of, wow, here is this Bob Dylan character or a Neil Young figure, someone who was extremely involved, on the front lines,” says Burns. “So it was a really dramatic feeling, being in Chile, hearing the music, hearing the history, just wanting to do something, wanting to connect to that experience. . . . His story resonates with a lot of what is going on today—Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib.”

*Wire fences still coiled with flowers  
of the night  
Songs of the birds like hands call  
the earth to witness  
Sever from fear before taking flight.  
Fences that fail and fall to the  
ground  
Bearing the fruit from Jara’s Hands*

Burns says other songs on *Carried to Dust* were influenced by the South American tour. “Some of the younger people we met in Chile were brought

up in families living in exile during the ’70s and ’80s. Their story worked its way into the song ‘House of Valparaiso.’ ”

It’s a beautiful, gentle tune, and Burns sings the main lyrics, while guest artist Jairo Zavala sings about the ocean’s waves in the background:

*Dialing in a forgotten voice  
(coming in like waves rolling off the coast)  
Sweeping through illegal ports  
(rising from the depths falling off the tongue)  
Ships drifting out of tune  
(coming in like waves rolling off the coast)*

*Many, many more, sculpting the shoreline  
Etching the harbor and the people  
Who’ve stayed afloat*

Calexico’s 2007 release, *Garden Ruin*, expressed the frustrations built up during W’s reign. “Cruel” opens the album with the lyrics:

*Cruel, cruel grounds  
Leak truths never found  
Torturous ways  
Whisper from the grave*

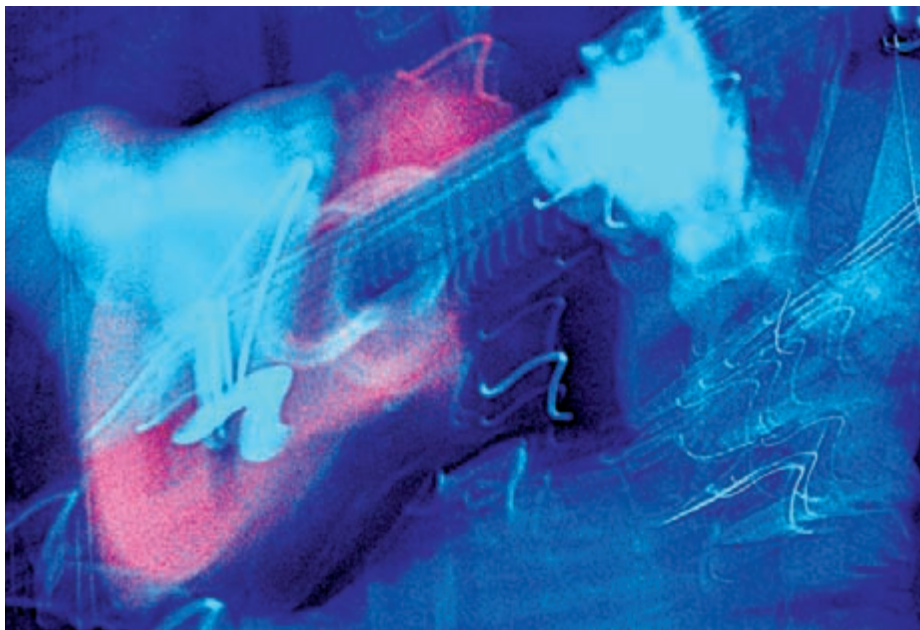
## *A slow spun song of distortion*

“Artists who had spoken out against the Bush Administration were shot down, ridiculed, or there were counter-protests against them, whether it be Dixie Chicks or Michael Moore, or Linda Ronstadt,” Burns says. “But we’re lucky because it’s not as extreme as things were down there in 1973.”

*Garden Ruin* was a departure for the band’s sound. It was a straight up rock album. *Chicago Tribune* rock critic Greg Kot wrote *Garden Ruin* was “as close to a pop album as Calexico has ever made.”

“From record to record the focus shifts,” Burns says. “Sometimes we end the record with jazz, a big band tune, some Gil Evans 1960s-era orchestrations. This last record features Doug McCombs on guitar, doing the whole Tortoise thing. We like all those different influences.”

“One of the great things about this band is their extreme flexibility,” says McCombs. “They love to invite different people to sit in with them and you get the sense that if they couldn’t, that it wouldn’t be any fun for them. I only wish that I could





reciprocate, but my band doesn't really work that way."

**C**alexico's live performances bring out its rocking side. I was blown away by the musicianship at the Chicago show. Unlike many bands, Calexico sounds better

itics" that emanated out of Washington, adding that a lot of other governments are now putting "obstacles in people's way the whole time just to make people feel uncomfortable."

Wenk spends three to four months a year working in the United States. "Over here, it's more conservative in

*There*, adds his harmonica skills.

Burns and Convertino are also in demand as producers and players on other musicians' albums, such as Goldfrapp and Arcade Fire. This summer, Burns performed with Neko Case on *The Tonight Show* with Conan O'Brien.



live than on CD. The horns, played by Valenzuela and Wenk, had a lovely, melancholy sound. (Wenk also managed to play accordion, harmonica, vibes, and even whistled.)

"We wish we could've been here on November 4," Burns told the packed house at the Cabaret Metro. "Everyone in the band partied full on."

The group moved seamlessly from one song to the next—a quiet acoustic number would flow into a dreamy pedal steel guitar tune, then into a flamenco-inflected melody. They infused their songs with dozens of musical allusions and played covers by Manu Chao, the Minutemen, and Joy Division. The group's influences are apparent, but the music never sounds derivative.

Calexico spends several months a year touring, a main source of money for the group, as record sales are down. "You have to play shows and hope that people come," says Wenk. "It's what we do for a living."

For an international traveling band, 9/11 and its aftermath have made things difficult. "It just seems like governments don't want people to travel," says Wenk, who lives most of the year in Europe. He blames the "bizarre pol-

general," he notes. "This religious right thing is just crazy, really crazy. Look at Sarah Palin."

Wenk joined the band ten years ago when Calexico was about to tour Europe and needed two trumpet players and a bassist. A native of Berlin who was playing in a fourteen-piece punk rock big band at the time, Wenk loved Calexico's music when he first heard it.

"It was like a ready-made nest," he says. "When I first came over to Tucson, Joey took me to a restaurant where mariachis were playing. Instantly, I felt I was in the deepest part of Bavaria. The polka, the waltz—these were the same melodies that the German brew masters brought over to Mexico, so I instantly had a connection."

Collaboration is a big part of both the sound and makeup of the band. *Carried to Dust* features a wide cast—Sam Beam of Iron and Wine fame, Amparo Sanchez and Jairo Zavala of the Spanish world music band Amparanoia, Tortoise's Doug McCombs, along with singer Pieta Brown. Mickey Raphael, whom Calexico met while working on the soundtrack to the Bob Dylan biopic *I'm Not*

"It's a very nice change to break out of your own little universe and actually learn from each other and meld music together that you think might not work," says Wenk. "But it does."

**I**n 2008, Calexico moved deeper into the universe. Democratic Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who represents the Tucson area, is a Calexico fan. Her husband, Mark Kelly, served as commander of the space shuttle *Discovery*, which traveled to the International Space Station last year. During shuttle flights, family members of astronauts pick the music that wakes the pilots from sleep in space. Giffords chose "Crystal Frontier" from *Even My Sure Things Fall Through*.

*Blood spills out on the streets  
And bodies are missing for weeks  
Both sides keeping a close eye  
Watching the bullets fly here  
On the crystal frontier*

I asked Wenk what it's like to have a song playing in space. "It's crazy," he told me. "Think about where it's traveling now." ♦

# While You Were Out



Besides needing a vacation from your vacation, the worst part of returning to work after a traditional summer holiday is the realization that you're going to need a minimum of two days for every day gone just to get back into the swim of things. And the mound of memos piled on your desk doesn't help.

Monday. 8:00 a.m. The janitorial crew came by and changed the locks on all the employee rest rooms and left everyone a key except you. Sorry, Martha.

Monday. 10:30-ish. Thought you should know some guy in accounting pawed through your trash. He took some—not much. Bobby.

Monday. 1:07 p.m. The new management consultant wants everyone to start wearing red suspenders as a morale-building exercise. Don't blame me, I just work here. For now. Mrs. Scott.

Monday. 3 p.m. I have been informed that the layoff wheel has been set up in the lunchroom. All employees will spin it once a week. Mitchell in NY.

Monday? I.O.U. one middle desk drawer. Thanks, dude. Ali.

Tuesday. 8:00 a.m. We've saved all our safety updates and will start printing memos on the reverse side. Like this one. Ignore swine flu warning on back. Thank you, Martha.

Tuesday. Some ridiculous single digit hour in the a.m. Your suggestion about cutting executive bonuses was forwarded to New York. Smooth

move. Ali.

Tuesday. 8:47 a.m. The new seniority system is now in place. Pick up your information packet in the lunchroom at your convenience. Between 1 and 2. Mrs. Scott.

Tuesday. 3 p.m. I have been informed that the janitorial crew will service each floor one day a week. Your floor is scheduled for Monday. Mitchell in NY.

Tuesday. 4:14 p.m. The new management consultant forgot at which

has been laid off. I have been informed he had a bad spin on the layoff wheel. Ali.

I hate these pink memos. Why don't we use e-mail? Can't you talk to Martha? Anyhow, Ticketmaster called. They mistakenly listed your number to call for Springsteen tickets and want you to forward people to the new number. I wrote it down on your filing cabinet in lipstick. Bridget. In reception. P.S. I like Springsteen.

Thursday. 8:00 a.m. Save your old staples. Gwen has volunteered to twist them into paper clips. Martha.

Thursday. 11:14 a.m. New York has determined that Casual Fridays are now Furlough Fridays. Typical. Mrs. Scott.

Thursday morning. Some idiot visited a Russian porn site and now there's a virus eating all the hard drives in the office. You might want to reboot your computers. Now. Mr. Roberson, VP of HR. By the way, whoever is shredding the layoff wheel every night, cut it out. It won't help.

Thursday. 4:17 p.m. The health care co-pay is now 100 percent. Not sure what that means, but it doesn't sound good. Mrs. Scott.

Thursday. Some guy from the IRS wants to see your trash. You're s'posed to call him when you get in, but I lost the number. Sorry. Bridget. In reception. Any news on Springsteen?

Friday. 8:00 a.m. Personnel called. They want to know your job description. Martha.

Monday? Again? How can that be? Dude, why is your car parked in the "Employees Only" lot? Kidding. I think. Welcome back. Just in time to spin the wheel. Ali. ♦



PAUL CORIO

Hyatt he is staying. Anybody who knows, please visit the East Conference Room. Do not call. The phones are broken. Mrs. Scott.

Wednesday. 8:00 a.m. Tonight's transitioning workshop has been relocated to the Denny's off exit 7. Martha.

Wednesday. Noonish. That guy from accounting brought back your trash. And somebody else's trash, too. It's all on your desk. Do you think I should call Bailbonds Without Borders? Bobby.

Wednesday. 3 p.m. Mitchell in NY

*Will Durst is a San Francisco-based political comic who writes sometimes. This is one of them.*

# What Good Are More Poems?

## Fire and Ink:

### An Anthology

#### Of Social Action Writing

*Edited by Frances Payne Adler, Debra Busman, and Diana García*  
University of Arizona Press. 480  
pages. \$32.95.

## Cry Wolf

*By Doug Anderson*

Azul Editions. 30 pages. \$5.

## This Side of Early

*By Naomi Ayala*

Curbstone Press. 68 pages. \$13.95.

## The Mind-Body Problem: Poems

*By Katha Pollitt*

Random House. 82 pages. \$23.

## By Matthew Rothschild

W. H. Auden was my first love. If I could trade in my whole professional life just to be him in 1939 (or Robert La Follette in 1917, for that matter), I'd do it in a flash. Auden combined the discipline and art of poetry with social commitment: "All I have is a voice/to undo the folded lie."

Since reading Auden in college, I've looked for poets who use their voices in this way. Over the last fifteen years, we've been bringing some of them to you, once a month, in the pages of *The Progressive*.

Many of them now reappear in a terrific new collection called *Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing*. Martín Espada is here, and so is Marilyn Chin, Paolo Corso, Alicia Ostriker, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Mahmoud Darwish, whose "House Murdered" may be the best poem we've ever published. Here's a

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*Matthew Rothschild is the editor of The Progressive.*

sample:

"Houses get murdered just as their residents get murdered. And as the memory of things murdered—wood, stone, glass, iron, cement—they all scatter in fragments like beings."

There are lots of other towering poets here, like June Jordan and Adrienne Rich, Jimmy Santiago Baca and Dennis Brutus, Carolyn Forché and Sharon Olds, and many, many more.

But this is an anthology not just of poetry but of powerful prose and interviews, too. The book includes essays by Gloria Anzaldúa, Juan Felipe Herrera, Langston Hughes, Audre Lorde, Gary Soto, and Alice Walker, to name a few. And two *Progressive* interviews are on display: Anne-Marie Cusac's with Sam Hamill, and David Barsamian's with Arundhati Roy.

You'll find a lot of inspiration and wisdom here. One essay by Thich Nhat Hanh cautions us that raising our voice is not enough: "To educate people for peace, we can use words or we can speak with our lives."

Anthologies are great, but I like to snuggle with a single poet sometimes. I want to hear the voice. I want to feel the passion. I want to soak in the images and detect the tropes. I want to watch for the hummingbird of surprise that darts off the page. And so I've picked out three recent books of poems that please me in all these ways.

The first, *This Side of Early*, is by Naomi Ayala. In "Barro," she writes:

*I fling my hot  
breath to the world—  
blessing and storm  
—feeding my maíz  
soul along the banks  
of my people's song.  
I am the river*

*and the women  
who wash in it.*

Several of her poems deal affectionately with the author's (or at least the narrator's) Latino family and upbringing. In "Cutter," the grandfather, who made his living by putting a machete to sugarcane, uses the tool at home to slay a bat that frightened her mother. In "Cada Vez," she remembers relatives who are no longer with us:

*The dead remember us.  
we gather in kitchens here,  
sign our days with their names.*

She moves on to some poems set in Washington, D.C., where she lives. One is entitled "Red," as in the Bush Administration's

*color-code for alarm, a call  
for everyone to turn  
spy, sentry*

*to fear every face,  
every darkness  
we cannot name.*

And she addresses the casualties of war, our own soldiers hospitalized, in a moving poem called "Subjects."

*Every war begins with taking.  
And where the pursed  
mouths of love released them,  
white halls cut off their breath.*

What I like most about Ayala, whom I just met on this reading, is her intensity. Her closing poem is entitled "Crickets," and it plays off of Keats's "On the Grasshopper and the Cricket." Keats opens with: "The poetry of earth is never dead," and closes in winter with the cricket still singing. Ayala takes it to the next

level.

*I think I want to be a cricket when  
I die—  
singing among thousands,  
punctuating the air with song  
for those who visit with the night.  
I want to go where it is I go  
and come back singing, always,  
somehow.*

Doug Anderson comes back singing, but in a much more somber key. A Vietnam vet, Anderson wrote about that experience in *The Moon Reflected Fire*. He returns to it in *Cry Wolf*, most notably in “Petitionary Prayer on Nguyen Duy’s Roof.” The last line is simply this plea: “God make me young again and not stupid.”

Anderson wrestles with mortality in several of these poems, including “Closer,” where he imagines Death, which he capitalizes, “sitting outside my door leaning on his cane.” The poet invites him in:

*We get caffeinated, buzz about  
old times, enemies we’ve outlived,  
how politicians continue to be  
what they are.*

In “Sixty One,” he writes:

*Death’s a street away  
walking parallel and at my pace. He  
gets a nod.*

He revisits the tale in “Odysseus,” imagining the returning soldiers

*now in Nursing Homes in Argos.  
Some brat-god  
taking back, one by one, each thing  
they loved.  
There is no dignity in this.*

But like Ayala, he finds redemption in his art. The closing poem, “Awake,” starts off describing fireflies. Like Ayala’s cricket, he becomes one at the end:

*I know that unless I touch the world*

*I remain dark.*

*one touch and both world and I  
fire our filaments.*

You probably know Katha Pollitt from her incisive and unflinching columns in *The Nation*, which have helped many of us survive the last three decades of reaction. But she’s also a poet, and a wonderful one at that. She’s got a new collection out, *The Mind-Body Problem*, and you’ll find her in a wise and reflective, if existential and mostly cloudy, mood.

She conveys this in “What I Understood.” Even as a child, she writes, she already knew “there was no God and that I would die.” Then, through almost a Hobbesian lens, she writes:

*the only thing I didn’t understand  
was how in a world whose  
predominant characteristics  
are futility, cruelty, loneliness,  
disappointment  
people are saved every day  
by a sparrow, a foghorn, a grass-  
blade, a tablecloth.*

She still doesn’t understand it, she confesses at the end.

Her weariness also shows in “Small Comfort.” Little things, like “coffee and cigarettes in a clean café” or “the laundry cool and crisp and folded away,” provide insufficient solace in a world where it is

*... too late to imagine  
people would rather be happy than  
suffering  
and inflicting suffering. We’re near  
the end.*

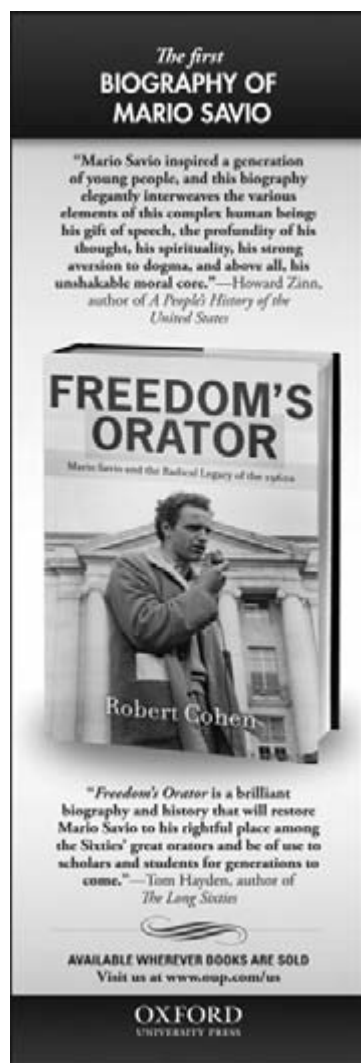
But even she can’t drop us there. “O before the end,” she allows,

*let the last bus bring  
lover to lover, let the starveling  
dog turn the corner and lope*

*suddenly,  
miraculously, down its own street,  
home.*

In a few other poems, she’s not so melancholy. She offers praise to “this marriage of friends and lovers made in a dark time,” and she does take pleasure in small comforts, writing that it is “possible to believe in a bearable sort of life.” I’m relieved to hear that.

Pollitt devotes a section of her book to debunking religion, which won’t surprise readers familiar with





her courageous atheism. She calls this section “After the Bible,” and has some fun with it. She starts at the beginning, with “The Expulsion,” whose opening stanza sets the feminist tone:

*Adam was happy—now he had  
someone to blame  
for everything: shipwrecks, Troy,  
the gray face in the mirror.*

The tree of knowledge, however, is “forlorn,” she writes, because, for a brief and vanished moment, it was “the center of attention.”

She concludes this section, naturally, with “Rapture,” where

*. . . Truth  
blares from every station on the dial.*

The last line of the poem stands as a final rebuke:

*“God, it appears, is elsewhere, even  
here.”*

If you’re looking to Pollitt’s book for a translation of all her politics into poetry, you’re

looking in the wrong place. For instance, there’s only one explicitly anti-war poem, and it’s not exactly to the barricades:

*and what good are more poems  
against war*

*the real subject of which*

*so often seems to be the poet’s superior*

*moral sensitivities? I could*

*be mailing myself to the moon*

*or marrying a pine tree,*

*and yet what can we do*

*but offer what we have?*

This is Katha Pollitt the poet, at a critical distance from Katha Pollitt the columnist. I appreciate the candor.

Most of all, I admire the beauty. Lines pop out, like “the world creaks on its hinges,” or:

*culture is a kind of nature*

*a library of oak leaves.*

Then there are entire poems, crystalline in their perfection, gorgeous and tasty as a florentine cookie dipped in chocolate. “Lilacs in September” is one. “The Heron in the Marsh” another. So, too, the final poem, “Lunaria,” which ends with this stanza, describing perhaps the poet herself:

*A paper lantern*

*Lit within*

*And shining in*

*The fallen leaves.*

Here is a poet fully in control of her artistic talents, someone who has taken the time, as she puts it,

*wondering how to write*

*so that what she writes*

*stays written.*

◆

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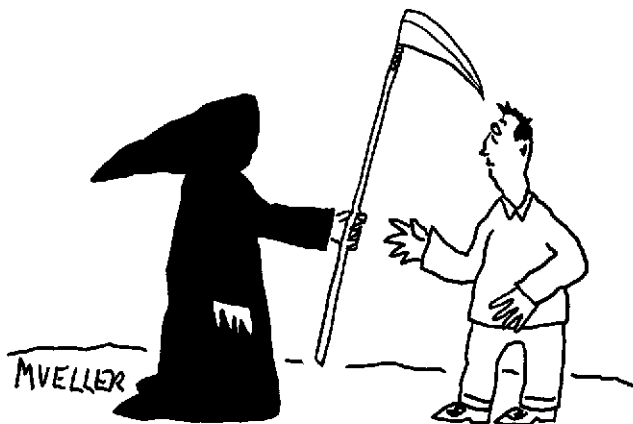
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# Fees R Us



Have you received your thank you note? I'm still waiting for mine.

A year into the Wall Street bailout, I've yet to get any sort of "thank you" from even a single one of the big banks that you and I have propped up with \$12 trillion in direct giveaways, indirect giveaways, government guarantees, and sweetheart loans. You'd think their mommas would've taught them better. But I've begun to think that waiting on a simple gesture of banker gratitude is like waiting for Donald Trump to have a good hair day—ain't gonna happen.

Far from showing appreciation, the largest banking chains are now going out of their way to stiff us. Instead of nice notes, they are quietly slipping new gotchas into our monthly credit card bills and bank statements. In June, for example, Bank of America abruptly raised its fee for a basic checking account by 50 percent. Citibank jacked up the interest rate on some of its cards to 29.99 percent. And JPMorganChase doubled the required minimum payment on its cards.

Across the board, fees have skyrocketed to their highest levels on record, including assessments for such common occurrences as overdrafts (as high as \$39), stop-payment

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*Jim Hightower produces The Hightower Lowdown newsletter and is the author, with Susan DeMarco, of "Swim Against the Current: Even Dead Fish Can Go with the Flow." (For more information, contact Americans for Financial Reform: [www.ourfinancialsecurity.org](http://www.ourfinancialsecurity.org).)*

actions (\$30—double what it was ten years ago), balance transfers (up more than 50 percent in the past year), and ATM use (doubled in ten years).

To add insult to injury, the banks blame us for their rate increases. Because the economy is such a wreck, industry spokesmen say there is a greater risk that customers will bounce checks or fall behind on their credit card payments. Thus, claim purse-lipped bankers, they must protect themselves from us by ratcheting up rates and fees. "There is an



JEM SULLIVAN

increased riskiness around repayment because of the recession," spaketh one lobbyist for the financial giants.

Glade doesn't make enough Spring Lilac to cover up the stench of this argument. Come on—it was the greed and incompetence of Mr. Jolly Banker that wrecked our economy, caused the recession, and forced the odious bailout on us. They want us to pay for that?

The truth is, they are socking it to their customers for two reasons: 1) they can; and 2) fee hikes are a shifty way to snatch enormous levels of new

income for themselves without doing anything to earn it.

These are the geniuses who made an ugly mess of the core business of banking—which is to write good loans. To make up for their huge losses in that business, bankers have essentially been reduced to flim-flam fee-scammers. Last year, imposing consumer fees became the main business of banks, totaling 53 percent of the industry's income!

That was before the current outbreak of fee frenzy. In the first three months of this year, for example, Bank of America's fee income rose 50 percent above the same period of 2008—an extra \$4 billion in revenue for the bank.

Fees R Us is what big banks have become. This is why they are panicked by reforms currently coming out of Washington. Already, President Obama has signed a bill to restrict credit card gouging, and Bank of America, Citigroup, and JPMorgan-Chase (which control about 58 percent of the nation's credit card market) are scrambling to jack up their rates and fees before the new law takes effect next February.

Now, the bankers are lobbying frantically to kill Obama's plan to create a Consumer Financial Protection Agency, which would have regulatory power to prohibit a wide range of finance-industry abuses. For the first time, we consumers would have our own seat at the regulatory table.

We need to be there because Wall Street's financial titans won't control their greed. For the sake of the economy, the well-being of America's majority, and the advancement of our nation's democratic values, we must do it for them. ♦

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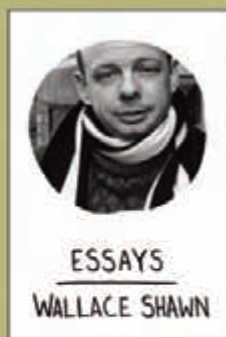
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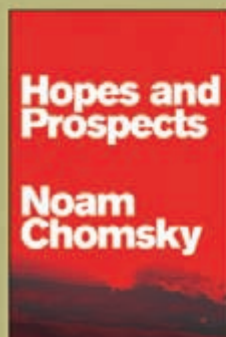
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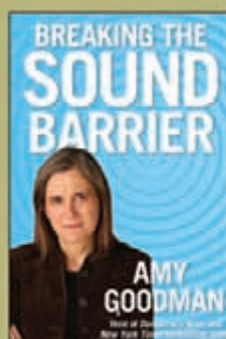
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